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THE MAKING OF...

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

HOW WESTWOOD STUDIOS REVIVED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

RELIVE THE CRAZY HIGHS AND LOWS OF VIDEOGAMING'S MOST IMPORTANT DECADE

IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER

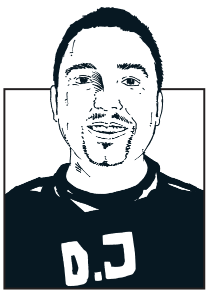
SPINDIZZY
REDISCOVER PAUL SHIRLEY'S FIENDISH ISOMETRIC PUZZLER

SUPER MARIO BROS 2
THE WORLD'S MOST UNDERRATED MARIO GAME AND WHY YOU SHOULD BE PLAYING IT

KLAX
HOW ATARI CREATED A PUZZLE GAME TO RIVAL THE MIGHTY TETRIS

THE RETROBATES

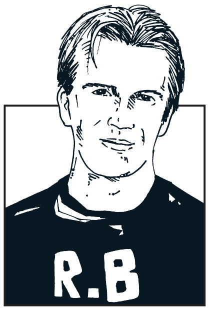
FAVOURITE STAR WARS GAME



DARRAN JONES

Again, it has to be the original arcade game. I once took my wife to every arcade in Porthcawl trying to find it so I could relive the happy holidays of my childhood. Needless to say she was not happy.

Expertise: Picking holes in *GTA IV*
Currently playing:
Magic: The Gathering
Favourite game of all time:
Robotron: 2084



RICHARD BURTON

Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader on the GameCube. Camped firmly in original trilogy territory, this graphical feast was good enough to persuade you that your sofa was, in fact, an Imperial TIE fighter.

Expertise:
Stuff and nonsense
Currently playing:
ROM Check Fail
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner



STUART HUNT

Super Star Wars. It's the first one I ever played, and it also has a giant Womp Rat – which I used to bullseye in my T-16 back home.

Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Ico
Favourite game of all time:
Ico



DAVID CROOKES

Masters of *Teras Kasi* was a classic with great use of the Lightsabers… Okay, I kid, I kid. I'm not ready to go to the Dark Side just yet. No, it would have to be *Knights Of The Old Republic*. I loved being able to design my very own Jedi.

Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Grand Theft Auto IV
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



PAUL DRURY

The arcade original. Hearing Han yell 'You're all clear, kid!', launching that missile, holding my breath and then watching in wonder as the Death Star exploded… nothing can beat the first time.

Expertise: Getting old programmers to confess their drug habits
Currently playing:
Frankie Goes To Hollywood
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



CRAIG GRANNELL

Despite technology rampaging ever onwards, nothing for me beats the original wireframe arcade game, with its spindly TIE fighters and scratchy samples.

Expertise:
Games you don't need 37 fingers to control
Currently playing:
Lots and lots of *Marble Madness*
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.

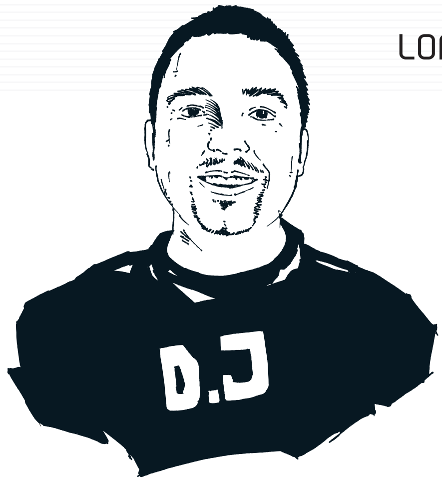


MIKE TOOLEY

Favourite Star Wars game has to be Battlefront, the first time the scale of the movies was realised in an action game. An amazing experience.

Expertise: Games that few have heard of and less have played
Currently playing:
Burnout Paradise
Favourite game of all time:
Mr Do!

LOADING...



It's amazing what little nuggets of information you start picking up when you stop playing videogames and actually do some research. Did you know, for example, that there are 13 different conversions of the *Star Wars* arcade game (14, if you count the alternative C64 port released by Parker Bros) or that there are over 90 different games that bear the official *Star Wars* name? If you didn't then you should find the first of our two-issue tribute to George Lucas's space saga absolutely fascinating.

If that wasn't enough we've also been able to track down Mike Hally, the project leader of the original arcade game, and used the Force to persuade him that these weren't the droids he was actually looking for (or something like that).

Still, we're perfectly aware that not every retro gamer has a built-in love of everything *Star Wars*, so you'll still find plenty of other great articles to sink your teeth into, from the creation of Atari's *Klax* to Westwood Studios' *Eye Of The Beholder* games. We've even managed to persuade Billy Mitchell and Walter Day to talk about their experiences on appearing in *The King Of Kong*. **Retro Gamer**, bringing you the exclusive coverage that other magazines can only dream of.

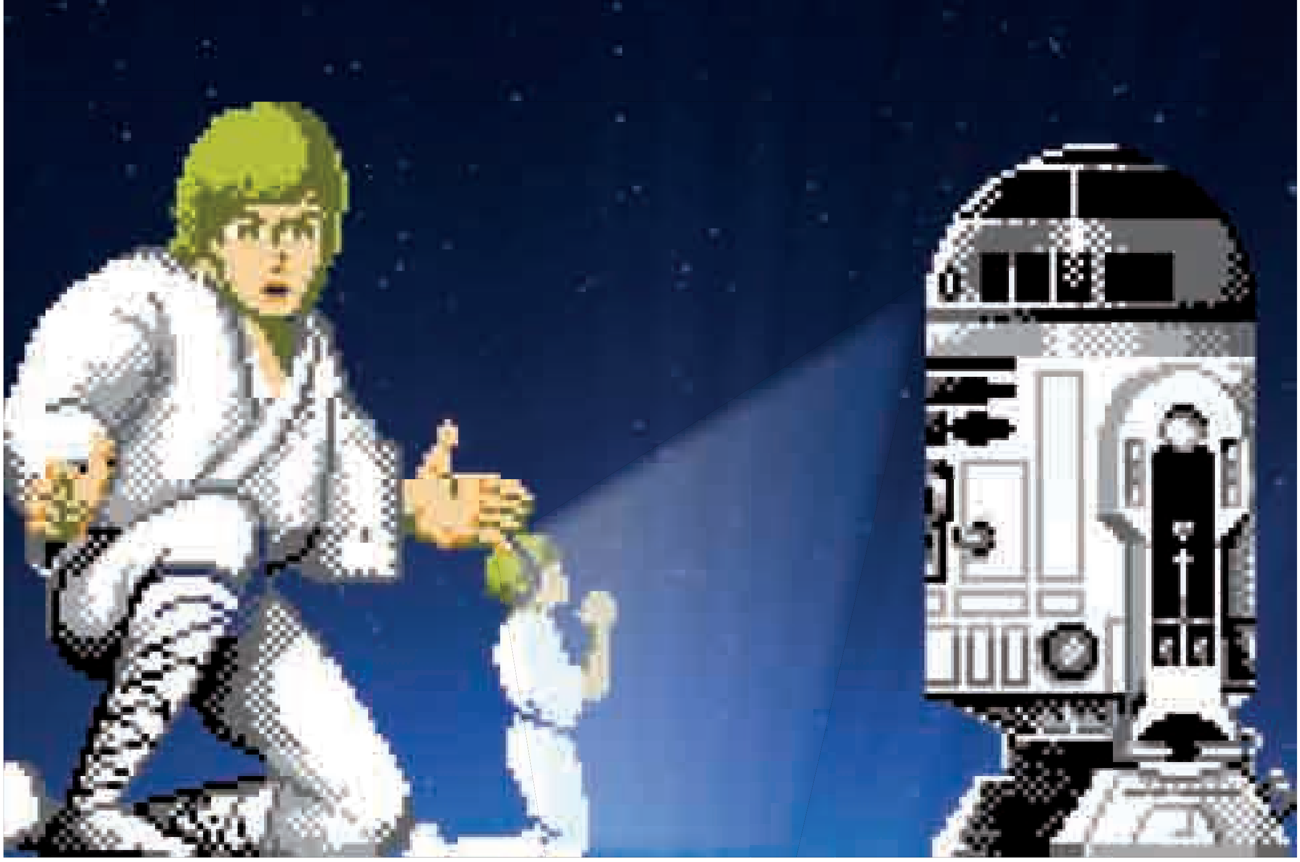
Enjoy the magazine



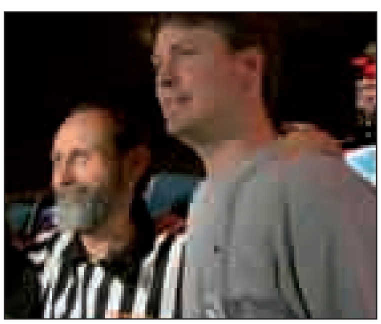


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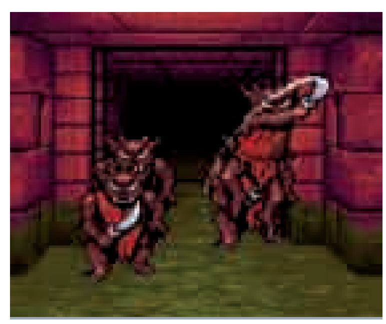
BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO CLASSIC GAMES



THE COMPLETE HISTORY: **THE STAR WARS SAGA**







INSIDE
At-a-glance retro sections...

ESSENTIALS

RETROINSPECTION – AMSTRAD GX4000



THE MAKING OF…

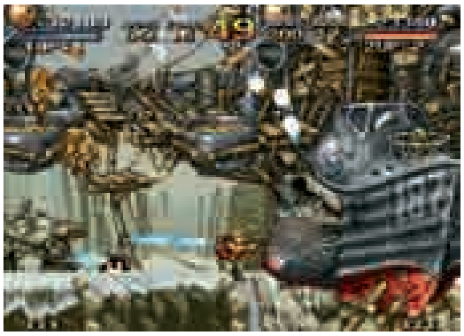


RETRORATED



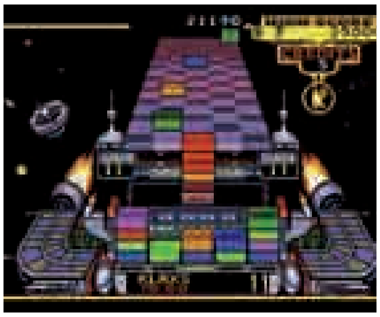
THE GAMES LISTING…

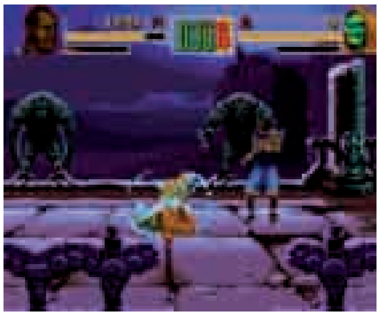
If it's a bumper compilation or a great new remake, then Retro Rated is where you'll find it



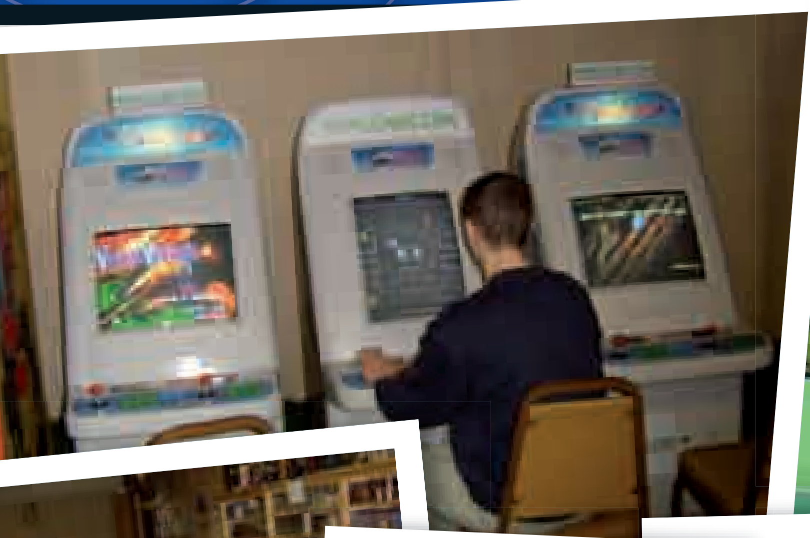


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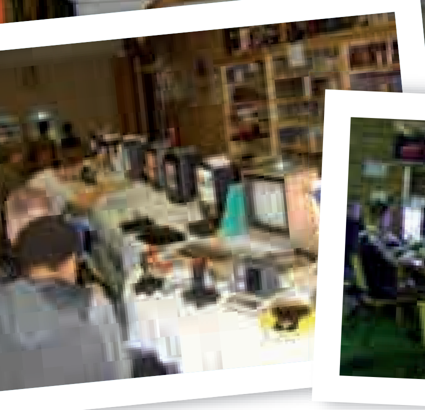




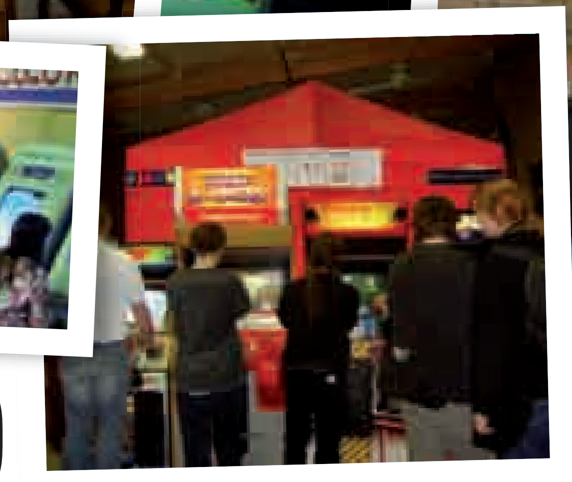


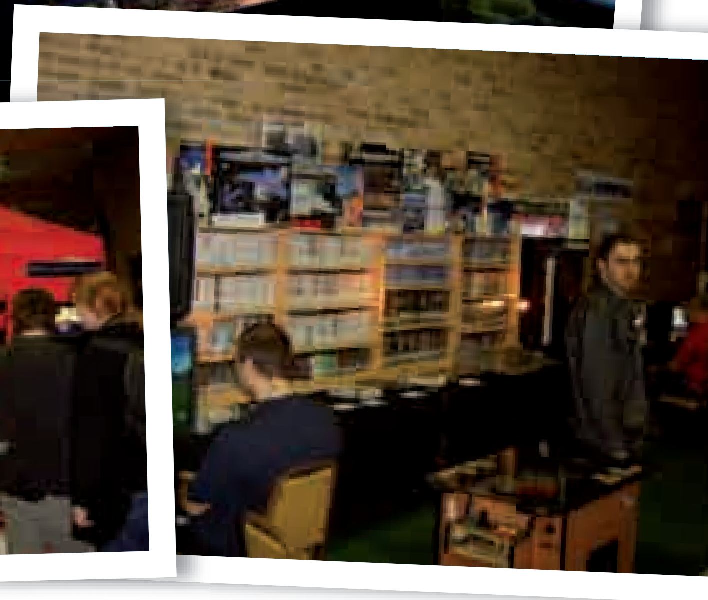












RETRO FUSION RETURNS

WE TALK TO **CHRIS WILKINS** ABOUT THIS YEAR'S RETRO FUSION



The summer's here and that can only mean one thing: Retro Fusion. Yes, the successful gathering of retro enthusiasts is back and this time it's being held at the Leamington Rugby Football Club on 19 and 20 July. The first event, The Retro Ball, was established by Chris Wilkins back in 2005 and has grown in both popularity and notoriety ever since. We had the pleasure of speaking with Chris recently to find out a little bit more about the history of his events and why this year's event promises to be the best one yet.

■ This is the third event you've had now. Where do you find the energy?
I'm pretty passionate about all that I do.

The first event I organised back in 2005 was called The Retro Ball. Basically I wanted to see if I could organise a successful event in the three months I gave myself. The feedback I received suggested that the event hit a chord with the 170 or so enthusiasts that attended. The charity Everyman was linked to the event to encourage guests and celebrities to attend – which thankfully they did. We handed over just short of £1,000 to the Everyman charity.

The second event should have been a follow up to The Retro Ball. The birth of my son and the commitment I had made to the Retro Fusion magazine took a little too much out of me at the time. In the end the event turned into a nice informal gathering of friends playing games all weekend and enjoying a curry in Kenilworth in the evening. Again, the format of the weekend went down well with the 70 or so guests that came along.

It's been nearly two years since I organised the last do. After attending Retro North last year, I was motivated to do something again. My wife was instrumental in springing me back into action and has supported me 100 per cent. Initially the next event was meant to be a small gathering of my forum friends – but word soon spread and in the end I made it more formal.



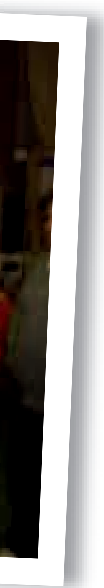
HAVE YOUR SAY ON THE FORUM

VISIT WWW.RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM/

Will you be attending this year's brilliant Retro Fusion event?



- Yep: I've really enjoyed past events / This will my first RF event **25%**
- Nope: Will have to sadly miss it due to other plans **75%**



I hunger for new challenges – so doing another event seemed the logical way to feed the pangs.

You're normally able to attract some great guests. Can you tell us who we can expect this year?
Well I have called on a few friends once again – so you can expect to see Archer MacLean, Andy Nuttal (Bullfrog) and Jon Hare at the event.

For this time though there are a few new faces. Martin Hollis, the producer of the seminal *GoldenEye* on the Nintendo 64, will be in attendance. Also we have Alex Trowers, who joins Andy Nuttal as part of the Bullfrog presence, Simon Goodwin who used to work on *Crash* and *The Games Machine* magazines and now works at Codemasters and Ste Pickford – one half of The Pickford Brothers.

The Oliver Brothers unfortunately cannot make the event this time.

Will there be a Q&A with the available guests, or are they simply turning up for a bit of fun?
The venue has a fully integrated PA system with wireless microphones – it would therefore be rude not to do some Q&As. This time the format will be a bit different. **RG**'s Paul Drury will be in attendance doing one-to-one interviews with the invited guests, 'Parkinson'-style. I'm hoping this will be a more successful formula than the all-for-one approach we've used before.

Will this be a more personal event like Retro Fusion: A Weekend of Gaming or can we expect it to be on a slightly grander scale?
I am hoping that the personal feel of the last event remains, even if the event is slightly more formal. At the end of the day, the majority of the attendees are those that frequent the main retro forums on the internet. The plan is to do name badges for all those who attend with their forum name emblazoned on them. There is no excuse then for forum friends to actually meet up and talk in the 'real' world than over a beer and a game of *Frogger*.

What machines are you hoping to have at the event?
I love arcades so you can expect to see a good selection of cabs for guests to play including upright and cocktail versions. Philip Oliver is also providing his original *Pac-Man* cab (refurbished by Archer).

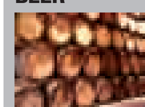
We will have two Pinball tables, supplied by Pinballers Anonymous.

There'll be loads of retro systems to play, as well as network games on the Xbox 360, PSones, Xbox and GameCube. We have four projectors for larger than life gaming – expect these to be used for *Mario Kart*, *Rock Band*, *Guitar Hero* and *Donkey Konga* on the GameCube (an event favourite).

The **Retro Gamer** forum members have been fantastic in offering to bring kit to the event for guests to play. Many thanks to all those who are helping.

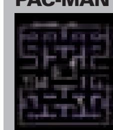
WHAT'S GOING ON?

BEER



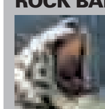
Plenty of liquidised yeast will be available (not that we can really condone drinking the stuff) it's just with it being summer and all you're likely to get a bit parched.

PAC-MAN



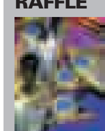
Yes the pill-popping dot will be there, not in person (obviously) but in arcade form. *Pac-Man* and other arcade classics will be there for you to show off your high-score talents on.

ROCK BAND



Yes, it's not retro but it is flipping ace. Darran's been banging on about it since he eBay'd one of his cats to fund its purchase, and he's never looked back.

RAFFLE



Up for grabs this year are two JAMMA cabs, yes two, not one, or three but two JAMMA cabs. And one of them is crammed with games, yes 1,000, not 800 or 732, but 1,000.

How about events and competitions? Should we bring along our *Guitar Hero* guitars?
The competitions are still being finalised. What I can say though is that Jonathan Cauldwell is writing a shoot-'em-up for the ZX Spectrum called *Fusion 48K* specifically for the event. The person scoring the highest score over the weekend will be presented a prize by Jonathan. TMR on the **Retro Gamer** forum is busily writing a *Fusion 64* shoot-'em-up for the C64 – a similar competition will be held with this game.

There will be a raffle where 1st prize will be a JAMMA cabinet with a JAMMA PC inside with over 1,000 games. The second prize will be JAMMA cabinet with a single shoot-'em-up game inside. These cabinets will be at the event for all to play over the weekend. RetroRik off the **Retro Gamer** forum funded the purchase of these cabs.

Will Porter has donated a framed, signed piece of artwork that will become a prize for one of the competitions.

You've chosen a new venue this year. Why the change in location?
The new venue is more 'cosy' than The Wardens Cricket Club that we have used previously and fits the format of the new event extremely well. There is a large open room with a second area coming off it. Each area is serviced by the main bar.

The main area will be used to house the retro systems and facilitate the Q&A session. The second room will be used for multiplayer gaming.

This will be the second time all proceeds will be going to Everyman cancer research. It obviously means a great deal to you…
Everyman was suggested for The Retro Ball by one of the other organisers. After reading about the charity, its cause seemed appropriate as the retro and gaming world is predominantly populated by males and testicular cancer is a common cancer that requires research for a cure. I've used the same charity again purely for continuity.

Will it be possible for people to turn up without tickets, or is it a strictly ticket-only event?
Tickets will not be sold on the day as it causes an admin nightmare. The person on the door is missing drinking and gaming time as well – surely this is a crime!

Will any retro sellers be on hand so we can pick up a bargain? Alternatively, have you considered a retro bring and trade option?
We should have a retro seller on hand. I have literally just heard that Consolepassion unfortunately cannot make it this time – I am currently looking to organise an alternative.

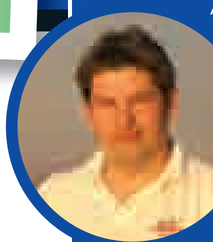
What has the response been like so far? Are you confident you'll pack the venue out?
I'm amazed at the take up so far. Over 100 tickets have been sold at the time of writing with the event two months away. I initially made 130 tickets available. I may raise this to 150 as there is normally a flurry of excitement in ticket sales the week before the event date.

So, if Retro Fusion has whetted something inside you, visit www.retrofusiononline.com/event08 where you can donate some money to a great cause in return for a great weekend of retro-gaming frivolity.

THE GUEST LIST

So you want to know who's making an appearance?

Archer MacLean



Archer will be there, probably regaling tales about how he taught Jimmy White to play snooker (on the Amiga, of course). And lambasting us for getting our *IK*'s mixed up in our top 25 beat-'em-up feature.

Andy Nuttal and Alex Trowers



Andy and Alex might sound like ex-game journos, but they're not, they helped Molyneux pioneer the God-sim, so you won't fail to spot them; they'll be the guys with big hands bossing little people around.

Jon Hare



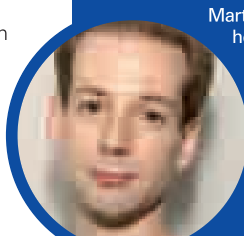
Founder of Sensible Software, Jon would be instrumental in giving the world the greatest football game ever made: *Sensible Soccer*. You never know, you might even get to play him – how strangely great would that be?

Ste Pickford



Get the chance to chat to half of the Pickford Brothers (the one with less facial hair). From *Zub* to *Wetrix* to their short spell at Rare, Ste will be there to answer any questions you have (if you sweeten him up with a beer or ten).

Martin Hollis



Martin Hollis will be there, he produced a little known Nintendo 64 game called *GoldenEye*, apparently it involved following men into toilets and blowing up Sean Bean. It was truly wonderful.

» GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD

RETRORADAR

LAST-MINUTE NEWS



Apparently most of the scenes in *Sam & Max* are shot using green-screen.

SAM & MAX HIT THE WII

We had the brilliant Frazer Nash pop into Retro Towers recently to showcase the new *Sam & Max* game. And as we're never ones to argue with Frazer (he looks a little like Grant Mitchell from *EastEnders*) we stopped mid-type to poke our heads round the games room door to give the game a sneaky look. And we were really impressed with what we saw. *Sam & Max: Season One* will be a spruced-up port of the PC classic, and will include the first six *Sam & Max* episodes. And as you would expect it will be making use of the Wiimote for its explorative point-and-click action. From what we saw it seems to have lost none of its charm, smile-inducing Americana air and that trademark *Sam & Max* wit, so expect a review soon.

RYU VS. SPEED RACER

QUITE POSSIBLY THE BEST GAME EVER





"Ryu, you better watch yourself, cos me and my homies are gonna ride right over your face beeatch."

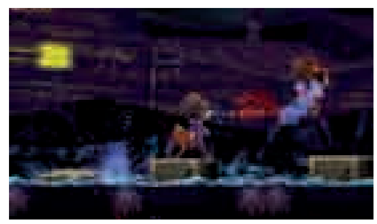
Since Midway announced last issue that it's busy working on a *Mortal Kombat Vs. DC* game, Capcom has hit back by counter-announcing that it's planning to release a new edition to its Vs. series: *Tatsunoko Vs. Capcom*.

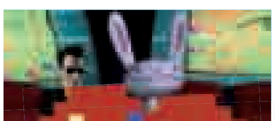
Now it's highly probable that some of you will be scratching your heads wondering who the heck is Tatsunoko? Well, allow us to elaborate. Tatsunoko is a long-running Japanese cartoon studio with the likes of *Speed Racer, Battle Of The Planets, Macross* and *Samurai Pizza Cats* on its books. Yes, the freakin' *Samurai Pizza Cats*. So while Capcom is keeping tight lipped about the project, we're utterly convinced that this is going to be something spectacular that will involve Ryu punching Speed Racer square in the helmet.

PLACE AN ORDER FOR ECCLESIA

NINTENDO'S DS GETS A BRAND NEW CASTLEVANIA GAME

Following up the excellent *Dawn Of Sorrow* and *Portrait Of Ruin*, Konami seems to again be sticking to Igarashi's *SOTN* template with another side-scrolling action adventure for the DS. The game, *Order Of Ecclesia*, is said to be adopting a new 'Glyph' combat system that lets players make use of 100 special attack combos. It will cover 20 areas, from dark, dingy castles to lush forests and oceans. It'll also make use of Wi-Fi to let two players duel, trade items and work together to beat the prince of comeback and unlock the game's endings. *Order Of Ecclesia* is set to hit shops in August, we'll keep you updated when we learn more from Konami.





HERO OF THE MONTH



BALLOON KID

Hero OF THE MONTH

Every month, Retro Gamer looks back at a classic videogame hero or heroine. This month it's the turn of Balloon Kid

First appearance: *Balloon Fight*

Distinguishing features: Bright red balloons

Weapon of choice: His body

Most Likely to: Send penguins plummeting to their doom.

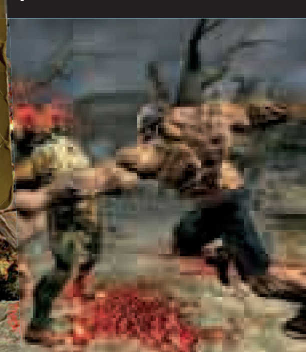
Least likely to: Blow up a balloon

Unusual fact: A DS game called *Tingle's Balloon Fight* was released by Club Nintendo

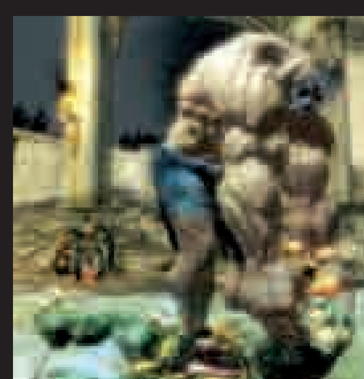
THE ORIGINAL RICK (WHO'S) DANGEROUS RETURNS

NAMCO MAKES A SPLATTER ON THE XBOX 360 AND PS3

Shock – that's one word we can use to describe the expressions on our face when we heard that Namco is digging up their *Splatterhouse* franchise for a brand new game on the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360.



And while details about the game are thin on the ground at the moment, we do have some screen shots that we're happy to stare at and make up a bunch of stuff around. So here goes. Well, it's clear that Namco and developer BottleRocket will be taking the series down a 3D hack-'n'-slash route (similar to the style and high volume of blood-letting that we've seen in the latest *Ninja Gaiden* game, we imagine) and if you look closely you'll notice that in one of the shots skin and muscle tissue has been gruesomely torn from Rick's arm leaving his bare bones on show, so there's a good chance the real-time character deformation will also be present. We are a tad concerned that the game has reputedly been in development for a while, but then again hopefully that means Namco is refining the game to the nth degree for its long-awaited release.



"Look pal, are you sure you're an orthodontist?"

retro GAMER DIARY

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO…

EVENT HOSTING retro GAMER

IF YOU WANT **RETRO GAMER** TO PROMOTE UPCOMING GAMES AND EVENTS, CONTACT US AT RETROGAMER@IMAGINE-PUBLISHING.CO.UK

Just because **Retro Gamer** looks to the past doesn't mean there aren't plenty of games and events to look forward to. Every month we list all the exciting games and events for you to add to your 'to do' list



JUNE

NEW INTERNATIONAL TRACK & FIELD

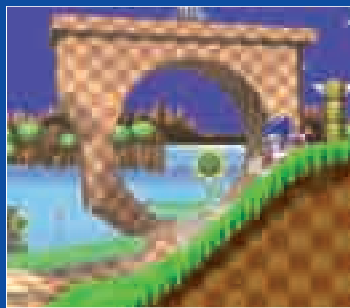
Released: 20 June

Publisher: Konami

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

It's back in the diary, yes, and it would appear that *New International Track & Field* is going all *Super Smash Bros* on us, adding more characters and pushing back its release date until highly volatile tempers explode. To be honest, we're not too bothered that we have to wait a little longer to get our hands on the game, as we're sure it will be great fun.



JUNE

SUPER SMASH BROS BRAWL

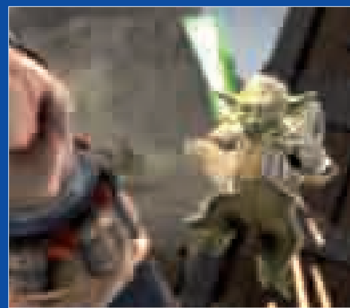
Released: 27 June

Publisher: Nintendo

Price: £34.99

Format: Wii

It's taken a while, but we've finally managed to secure a copy of *Smash Bros* and it's absolutely brilliant. We would have reviewed it this very issue, but there's so much to uncover on it that we've decided to spend a little more time on it. Sonic has quickly become the brawler of choice, but Snake gets a lot of play as well.



JULY

SOUL CALIBUR IV

Released: July

Publisher: Ubisoft

Price: £49.99

Format: 360, PS3

Namco's popular swashbuckling series is making its way to next-gen consoles. Early word is positive, with hints at new characters, including Jedi Master Yoda for Xbox 360 and Sith Lord Vader for PS3; plenty of play modes; and an online battle feature. This makes us all the more eager for this game's summer release. In the meantime we'll just have to play the Dreamcast version.



JULY

SOUL CALIBUR

Released: July

Publisher: Namco

Price: 1,200 Points

Format: Xbox Live Arcade

There are two exciting *Soul Calibur* entries in the Retro diary for July. The next-gen *SC IV* (see left) and the Dreamcast port of *Soul Calibur* to XBLA. Sega released several Dreamcast hits on the Wii, and now Namco is releasing *Soul Calibur* hot on the heels of titles like *Rez and Ikaruga*. The lack of online play is annoying, but it's a small price to pay for owning such a great beat-'em-up.



JULY

RETRO FUSION '08

Dates: 19-20 July

Location: Leamington Rugby Club, Warwickshire

Admission: £12

Website: www.retrofusiononline.com/event08

We've always enjoyed our trips to Chris Wilkins' retro events, and we're expecting his latest to be better than ever. Taking place at a brand new location, and once again supporting the Everyman Campaign, Retro Fusion '08 is already on our 'to do' lists. If you're a fan of retro gaming and drinking we suggest you sign up for tickets right now.



SEPTEMBER

SAMBA DE AMIGO

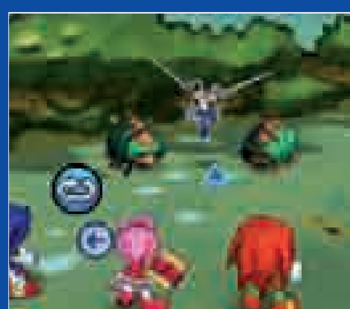
Released: September

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: DS

Hooray, another classic Dreamcast game gets given a nip and tuck for Nintendo's wonderful Wii. We're huge fans of the original maraca-shaking party game, and if Sega is able to capture the same magic with two remotes then *Samba* could quite possibly receive the healthy sales that it has always deserved. Early reports suggest that no new songs will be included, but we'll bet our bottom dollar that you'll be able to download some.



SEPTEMBER

SONIC CHRONICLES: THE DARK BROTHERHOOD

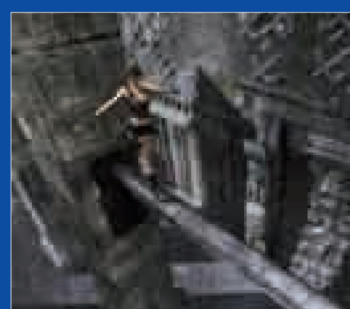
Released: September

Publisher: Sega

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

Apart from its silly name, we can't see how *The Dark Brotherhood* can possibly fail. It features the most popular hedgehog in the world, some gorgeous cel-styled visuals and it's being created by those RPG masters BioWare. Indeed, such is this developer's skill within the genre that even if it was told to create a bad game on pain of death it would simply be unable to do so.



OCTOBER

TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD

Released: October

Publisher: Eidos

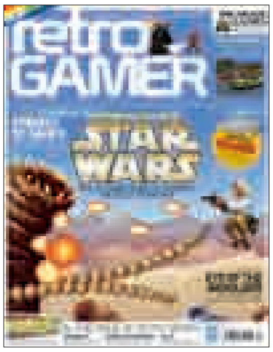
Price: £49.99

Format: 360, PS3

You can't really blame Eidos for releasing a third title in as many years. Following on directly from *Legend*, Lara once again finds herself up to her pretty neck in bad guys and ancient artefacts. Expect puzzles, a better aiming system, and a clever new engine that keeps track of incidental things like tracks in mud and dead bodies so you can find your way around more easily.

THE RETRO FORUM

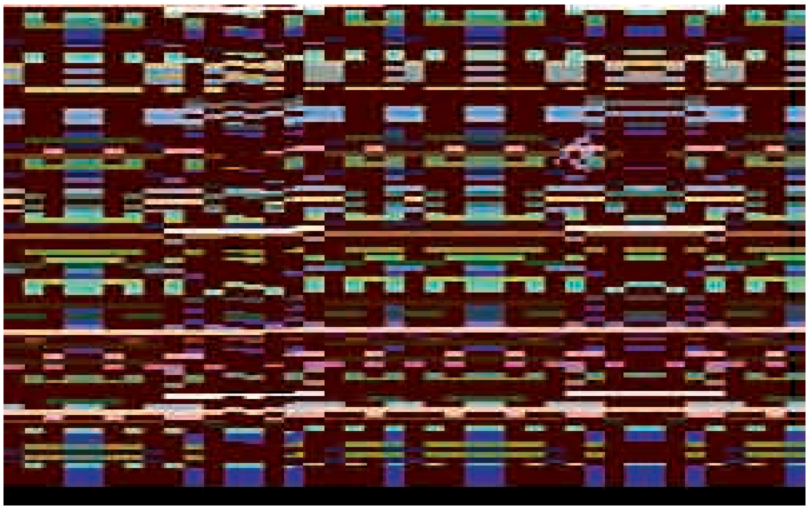
HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – WWW.RETROGAMER.NET



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» *Yars' Revenge*'s Qotile explosions were apparently the inspiration for the look of CPC loading screens.

COP A LOAD OF THIS

Dear Retro Gamer
First, thanks for the excellent magazine. Having been born in 1972, I grew up with ZX81s, VIC-20s, C64 versus Spectrum, Amiga versus Atari, Mega Drive versus SNES, and so on. I remember when PC games consisted of a handful of flight-sims played out on a green monitor.

Ah, the days of games on tape, £1.99 for a Mastertronic game from the local newsagent, reading *Zzap!64*, taking a whole hour to play just ONE mission on *Gunship* (due to the large amount of tape loading – but worth it, you needed patience to play games back then).

Speaking of loading, I enjoyed your article on *Fate Of Atlantis* – one of my all time favourite games. I had it originally on the Amiga 500 and it took absolutely ages to play due to the constant disk swapping. The end and escape sequence took about ten swaps. I still play it though, on the PC.

Question: Why are DS games so bloody expensive? They generally cost more than PS2 or PSP games! What's going on? I rarely buy them now because of the price. Nice though the DS is, the games are too costly for such a limited system.

All the Best!

Martin Wells, Bristol

Thanks for your letter, Martin. Yes, loading times and disk-juggling are the only things we don't miss about retro games. But like you, what we do pine for is forking out £1.99 for a new budget game. To be honest, we don't really find DS games to be any more expensive than PSP titles. Games for both handhelds tend to retail for around the £30 mark. Perhaps it's worth waiting for the games you really want to come down in price, or maybe even comb the trade-in section in Game for a few lucky finds.

A SHOWERING CRUSADE

Dear Retro Gamer,
When I was reading through the birthday issue of **RG**, on the *Indiana Jones* screenshot in the 'Back to the Nineties' article I noticed a peculiar banner on one of the train carts. "RETROGAMER & SON". Come on guys, I thought you were better than shameless Photoshop self-appreciation. What's next? *Retro Gamer* shower gel?

Lee Crook

That there, Lee, is the Photoshop talents of Richard Burton. To be honest we didn't even spot the doctoring of the 'good doctor' ourselves. While we like the idea of seeing **Retro Gamer***-themed products appearing on the shelves of Waitrose, do you really want*



Darran staring back at you as you wash your back with a loafer?

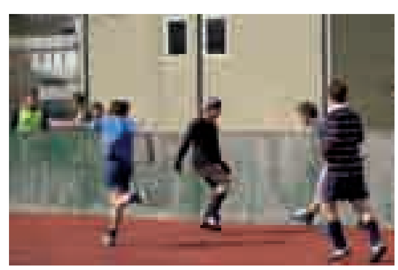
BLUE ARMY

Hi folks at Retro Gamer.
Just a quick note to praise you for an issue that I've not even read yet! Let me explain.

Despite growing up with a 48K Spectrum, I've always loved Nintendo and especially a certain fellow called Link. So imagine my glee when my subscription edition arrives this morning… 12 pages (and other Hyrule related bits and pieces throughout the mag) dedicated to Shigeru Miyamoto's greatest creation. I can't wait. What with that and my team, Pompey, in the FA Cup to look forward to, I think this is going to be a good day.

Cheers
PS My eight-year-old nephew (who got a DS for Christmas) will love the issue, too. He's as *Zelda* mad as I am!

Ted Webb



» Our designer, Stephen (white shorts with ball at his feet), gears up to make a pass to Stuart (the idiot with his arm out) who, two seconds after this photo was taken, fluffs the shot.



EVERY MONTH, ONE lucky reader will receive an extremely trendy **Retro Gamer** T-shirt (thankfully, not one worn by Darran) and a snazzy new **Retro Gamer** binder. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words in it will go down just as well…

Yes, it's true we have a son, but he lives with his mum… we don't really want to talk about it to be honest.



Cheers, Ted, we hope the article lived up to your expectations. Congratulations to you on Portsmouth winning the FA Cup. Stuart's from your neck of the woods and is also a Pompey fan. It's a shame he can't play the sport to save his life – as our recent Imagine five-a-side competition proved. If anyone's interested in how we did, we came mid-table. We won 2, drew 2 and lost 2.

RIGHT TO REPLY

Dear Retro Gamer,

First, I want to tell you how much I enjoy your magazine. It's a highlight of every month for me – even if the postal service manages to find a way to wreck it every time. Second, I would like you to please write a special on Intellivision and also include more Intellivision coverage in the magazine. Here's why:

It was the only real competitor to the Atari 2600, at least in the United States, leading to a great debate about which was better. Although Intellivision clearly had better graphics, the Atari had such an incredible catalogue of games. And, of course, Intellivision wins in the final analysis because it didn't have *E.T.*.

The games it did have were great: *Astrosmash, Baseball, Space Battle, Night Stalker, Shark! Shark!* and so on. The developers for these games are still out there today, having formed the Blue Sky Rangers and still producing Intellivision-related items.

From the forum

EVERY MONTH, **RETRO GAMER** ASKS A QUESTION ON THE FORUM AND PRINTS THE BEST REPLIES. THIS MONTH WE WANTED TO KNOW…
YOUR FAVOURITE STAR WARS GAME?



ID: TMR
Am I allowed to say *Millennium Assault* on the C64 since I wrote it and it's not official…?

ID: Bub&Bob
Easy – *Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy.* Fun, full of laughs and no mention of Dash Rendar – It's like he doesn't exist!

ID: Wil
The original arcade vector *Star Wars* is the only one that ever made me feel a connection between the game and the movie. Everything else since may have had the trappings of *Star Wars* but, to me, they didn't feel like *Star Wars*.

ID: Elgin_McQueen
Teras Kasi. Not for any subversive or niche reasons, simply because it's the only one I've ever played.

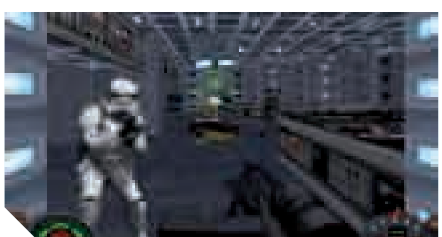
ID: sscott
The *Super Star Wars* trilogy on SNES were fun, though very tough for *Star Wars* games.

ID: Ian Smith
Star Wars arcade (vector game). At the time, with the amazingly lifelike graphics and sound, it was just like being in the movie. Doesn't have the same effect now though.

ID: Monkey Puzzle
The thrill of blowing up the death star for the first time in the original Atari *Star Wars* arcade has yet to be beaten.

ID: yethboth
Star Wars remake on the PC. One of the greatest remakes ever.

ID: Overheat
Well, I don't think I've ever really been interested in a *Star Wars* game. I haven't seen all the films and therefore I'm somewhat put off by it all – but I must admit that the new *Force Unleashed* game has me rather interested..



CONTACT US **Snail Mail:** Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ **Email:** retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

WE'RE ALWAYS LOOKING FOR GAMERS WITH UNUSUAL COLLECTIONS, SO NATHANIEL FRANCIS PROVED TO BE THE PERFECT CANDIDATE. HIS COLLECTION PROVES IT'S WELL WORTH VISITING YOUR LOCAL CAR-BOOT SALE



» I'm a hardware junkie and here is most (not all) of what I've managed to get my hands on. The Asian-spec PAL Mega Drive is one of my favourites and is in great condition, as is the Neo-Geo AES, which is something I never thought I would own.



» When he's not reading *Mean Machines*, Nathaniel Francis is a 27-year-old ad network manager who hails from Peterborough. His entire collection is either bought directly from car-boot sales or funded by the games he finds there.

» This is the Miracle Piano teachi
sale. The keyboard hooks







» I've now managed to collect around 200 Mega Drive games over the last few years, not all of them *FIFA* games.



…ching system for Nintendo's NES; one of my greatest finds ever at a car-boot …oks up to the NES and teaches you how to play it. It was a bargain at just £10.



» This Amstrad Mega PC was given to me by a friend who found it in his fiancée's loft, of all places. It's a little yellow but works like a treat and as a massive Mega Drive fan, is a lot of fun to use.



» A little more of my collection. It's truly amazing what you can find at car boots and I've picked up some amazing bargains over the years.



» I've been lucky enough to find all of these handhelds at car boots with the exception of the *Zelda* Game & Watch, which was actually a present. I'm especially happy with the widescreen Game & Watch, as it's boxed and is in pretty good condition.

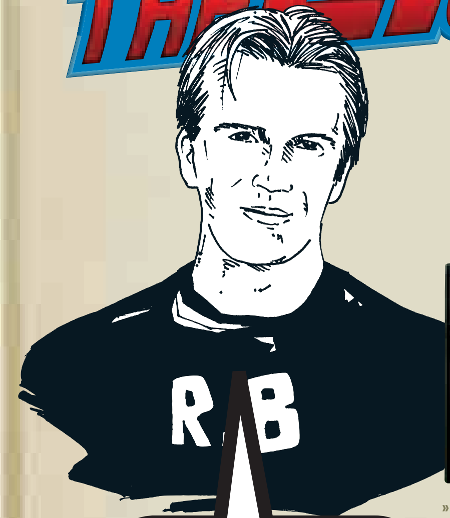




» As well as games, I also enjoy the paraphernalia that surrounds them, as this picture proves. Finding these two massive Donkey Kongs was especially fun and I've never felt so conspicuous when walking away from a car-boot sale.

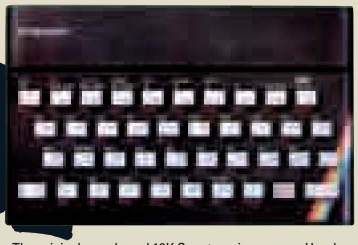
If you have a collection that you feel the rest of the **Retro Gamer** readership needs to know about then contact us at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and we'll do our best to get you in the magazine.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

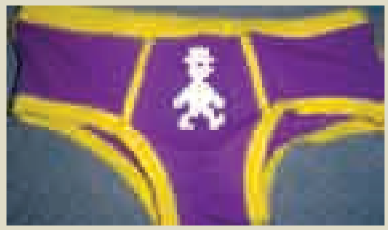


THE LATEST NEWS FROM AUGUST 1984

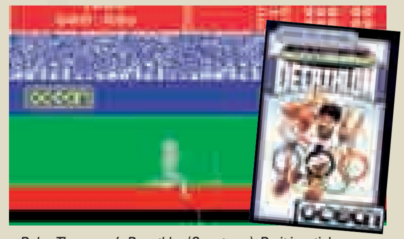
August 1984 – 16K and Model A gone, dead Rabbit, Activision does a Microdeal, Daley RSI comes to the Spectrum and Eddie Kidd jumps stuff so you don't have to. Richard Burton revs up and makes a skid mark...



» The original grey-keyed 16K Spectrum is no more. Hey, hey, 16K. No longer made for the UK…



» Marks & Spencer release software – all of it pants. Fortunately, their pants had more longevity than their games.



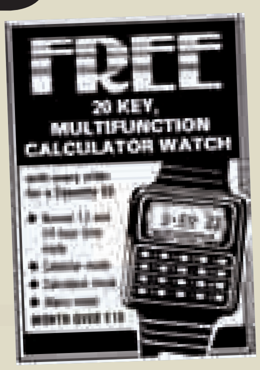
» *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* (Spectrum): Be it joysticks, keyboards or a dislocated thumb – Daley was responsible…

Sinclair announced that it was to drop the 16K Spectrum from its future plans. The 48K machine was outstripping the 16K version in sales with it accounting for just five per cent of Sinclair's UK sales. The company would still manufacture the 16K machine but solely for the overseas markets.

To coincide with the demise of the 16K Spectrum, Sinclair revealed it would be including a software bundle called the Spectrum Six Pack. Featuring such titles as *Make-A-Chip, Survival* and *Chess*, it was hoped it would propel the Spectrum towards a successful autumnal sales period… and clog eBay up with thousands of copies of *Make-A-Chip* 24 years later…

Similarly, Acorn confirmed that production of the BBC Model A would stop at the end of August. This was due to sales figures showing it had been beaten by its bigger and more expensive brother, the BBC Model B. This was compounded with the Acorn Electron also selling very well.

Rabbit Software, producers of games such as *Paratroopers* and *Potty Painter,* and who had been struggling for several months, finally succumbed and went into voluntary liquidation. The company, as with many smaller software houses, had been going through a particularly tough time with sales tailing off and orders drying up as the quality of other software releases improved.

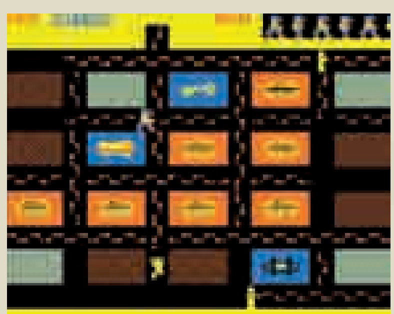


» *Cassette 50* (C64): Cascade's legendary compilation came free with a calculator digital watch… maybe that should be the other way around?

It also emerged that the company had internal upheaval and upset to deal with following the death of their founder, Alan Savage, who took his own life following a motorway accident just three months previous.

Cornwall-based software house Microdeal found itself on the end of some legal wrangling from the mighty Activision, who were pressing for a breach of copyright regarding its top-selling *Pitfall* game. Microdeal had produced a similar-looking piece of software using its core character Cuthbert for *Cuthbert In The Jungle*. Microdeal *had* obtained a licensing agreement to produce the game but, unfortunately, Activision had been granted permission first, leaving Microdeal high and dry and the game being withdrawn from all stockists.

With Imagine Software going into liquidation, questions were being asked about the Megagames and their future. Did the newly formed company, Finchspeed, actually own the rights to the game following its hasty formation prior to Imagine going pear-shaped?



» *Oh Mummy!* (Amstrad CPC464): One of the first Amsoft titles released, *Oh Mummy!* is still a favourite among Amstrad fans.

Initially everyone had thought so, but it seems this was not the case – all work pertaining to the Megagames was now in the hands of the liquidators. To quote the liquidators: "According to law, any disposition of company assets taking place after a petition for winding up is presented can be set aside." So, the Megagames were in liquidation limbo.

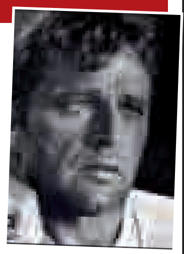
While software houses were falling like nine pins, the retailer Marks & Spencer announced that it was going to dip its musty middle-aged toe into the gaming waters. Producing some of its own software under the St Michael Software label, it would also re-release former top-selling titles from other software companies. Marks & Spencer's eventual output was small and fairly disappointing, not unlike its Y-fronts.

Computer keyboards would never be the same again; joysticks would be found snapped in half and embedded in bedroom walls across the country and the right forearms of many a gamer would be twice the size of the left, all thanks to Ocean's latest release, *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*. The game, released on C64 and Spectrum initially,



» *Paratroopers* (Spectrum): Rabbit Software goes into liquidation after financial struggles. No more average games like this then…

1984



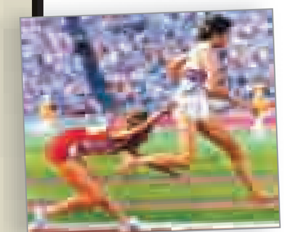
» Richard Burton dies. Not me, the actor from Wales. Mind you, I do feel a bit ropey at the momen… ugh…

AUGUST NEWS

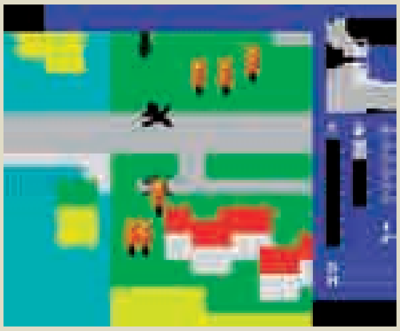
11 August saw controversy at the Los Angeles Olympics during the women's 3000-metre final between favourites Zola Budd and Mary Decker of the USA. Zola Budd had already created a furore after being fast-tracked for British citizenship. She could then run for the UK rather than her native South Africa, who were banned from all international sporting competition because of their stance on apartheid. During the final the two women clashed at the mid-point when Decker caught Budd's foot with her spikes (Budd usually ran barefoot). The startled Budd accidentally tripped Decker, ending her race. Budd finished in seventh, was later disqualified, but reinstated after review.

11 August also saw President Ronald Reagan make a legendary verbal lash-up while live on TV during a microphone check. Just before the worldwide broadcast he said, "I am pleased to announce I just signed legislation which outlaws Russia forever. The bombing begins in five minutes." Yep, that should end the Cold War good and proper…

5 August saw actor Richard Burton die at the age of 58. He had just completed filming on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the adaptation of George Orwell's famous book.



» Decker spikes Budd, Budd trips Decker, Decker eats track and tries to pull Zola's shorts down as she falls.



» *Tornado Low Level* (Spectrum): Costa Panayi and Vortex create another Spectrum classic with this 3D fighter-plane game.

would turn out to be a chart topper for many months, as well as a nightmare for the Sinclair returns department.

From top drawer to pants drawer, Cascade Games proudly announced the latest version of its infamous Cassette 50 games compilation. Featuring a selection of type-in quality games, some of which even worked, the Cassette 50 phenomenon was available on formats ranging from the Apple to the Oric and everything in between. The newly released C64 version would set you back £9.95. If you waited a few short months, however, you could have bagged yourself a magnificent calculator digital watch, free with every purchase.

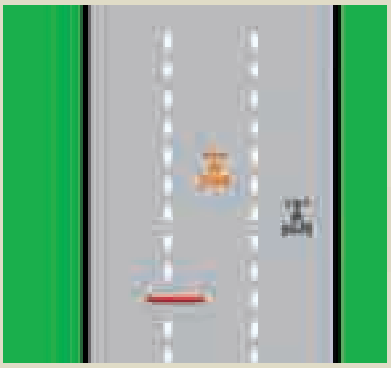
Martech announced it had signed a deal with Eddie Kidd, the daredevil motorbike rider who had recently set a world record jumping 14 double-decker buses covering 190 feet, to produce a game based on his jumping escapades. Although it was only now made public, the game was virtually complete and ready for release at the end of the month.

The game itself, Eddie Kidd's *Jump Challenge*, tried to re-create those dangerously long jumps on your C64 and Spectrum, without the danger of your own kneecaps popping 20 metres into the air on landing.

Landing firmly on the newsstand for its launch issue this month was *Your C64*, sister magazine to *Your Spectrum*. Similar in style to *Your Spectrum*, it contained programming and hardware features, as well as plenty of gaming content. Among the reviews in the debut issue were *Who Dares Wins* (dk'Tronics, C64), *Trader Trilogy* (Quicksilva Vic-20) and *Motor Mania* (Audiogenic).

Also debuting this month was *CPC464 User* for the Amstrad CPC machine. The first batch of reviews was solely Amsoft titles with *Amsgolf, Codename Mat, Roland In The Caves* and *Oh Mummy!* among the Amstradian delights on offer.

Computer & Video Games' Game of the Month was *Bruce Lee* (US Gold, Atari) with *Battle Planets* (ISP, BBC), *Wonderworm* (Thor, BBC), *World Cup* (Artic, Spectrum), *TLL* (Vortex, Spectrum) and *Sabre Wulf* (Ultimate, Spectrum) all rating highly.



» *Motormania* (C64): Simplistic yet fun racing game from Audiogenic. Not testing in any way but entertaining nonetheless.

THIS MONTH IN…

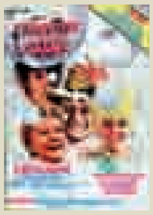
YOUR SINCLAIR



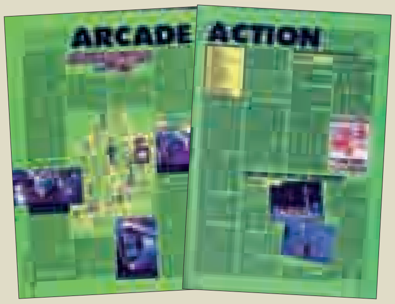
The regular feature highlighting strange and exotic users of the Spectrum focused on Paul Brown, an archaeologist who used his machine to excavate an Iron Age site. By this we mean he had written a program to calculate the position of finds in an excavation trench rather than using his Spectrum as a spade.



COMPUTER & VIDEO GAMES



This month's *C&VG* had the Arcade Spy in its Arcade Action column, which looked at some of the best arcades around London and what gems they contained. The London Leisure Centre threw up classics such as *Robotron, Gorf, Joust* and *Spy Hunter.*



BIG K



Their roving reporter found himself at CES in Chicago looking into the good and not-so-good new products on show. Weirdest offering must go to Atari's Mindlink: an experimental games controller utilising the power of your brain. That'll be the sensors picking up the encephalographic waves don't yer know…



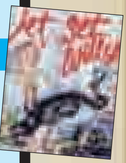
CHARTS

JULY 1984



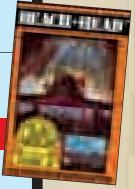
MUSIC

1 Two Tribes (Frankie Goes To Hollywood)
2 Careless Whisper (George Michael)
3 What's Love Got To Do With It (Tina Turner)
4 Agadoo (Black Lace)
5 Relax (Frankie Goes To Hollywood)



SPECTRUM

1 Jet Set Willy (Software Projects)
2 Sabre Wulf (Ultimate)
3 Psytron (Beyond)
4 Fighter Pilot (Digital Integration)
5 Night Gunner (Digital Integration)

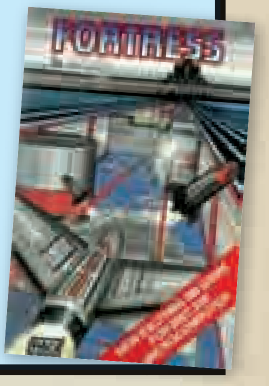


COMMODORE 64

1 Beach Head (US Gold)
2 International Soccer (Commodore)
3 Flight Path (Anirog)
4 Blagger (Alligata)
5 Manic Miner (Software Projects)

BBC

1 Fortress (Pace Software)
2 Blagger (Alligata)
3 Aviator (Acornsoft)
4 Chuckie Egg (A&F Software)
5 Cyclon Attack (A&F Software)



BACK TO THE NINETIES



THE LATEST NEWS FROM NOVEMBER 1990

NOVEMBER 1990 – The Super Famicom is here at last (well, it is in Japan), Crowther releases Captive and Double Dragon II, Double Dragon 3, Last Ninja 3 and a fat bloke with a big tongue all fight it out. Richard Burton takes a look at the takeaway menu…



» 21 November 1990: please be upstanding for the Super Famicom/Nintendo. Just two years to *Super Mario Kart* then…

On 21 November 1990, the Super Famicom finally arrived, and the Japanese were getting extraordinarily excited. The machine sold out almost instantly, with the initial 300,000 consoles selling out within a few hours of release. There were just two games available on the day of launch – *Super Mario World* and *F-Zero*. Sadly, though, the UK would have to wait until April 1992 to get its hands on the British version – the Super Nintendo/SNES.

Just released in Japan on the Mega Drive, although available via import, was a game proving that those Japanese games developers have been necking sake by the pint. *Tongue Of The Fatman*, later renamed *Slaughter Sport* for the American market, was plain weird. The game itself was a bog-standard beat-'em-up with the added spice of a number of intriguingly strange characters. Among the legion of oddities were Webra, a spider; Sheba, who has deadly hair; the aforementioned Fatman (real name Mondu), who has a tongue that whips out of his belly and Robochic, a cybernetic, rocket-powered chicken.



» *Tongue Of The Fatman* (Mega Drive): Weird name, odd characters but a good, solid fighting game from the Japanese.

Mad is one thing, *MAD* is quite another. The Black and White Spies from *MAD* magazine had been computerised and inserted into a bomb-ridden, trap-encrusted house in *Spy vs. Spy* by First Star Software for the NES. The aim of the game was simple: find items concealed in the house and escape to an awaiting plane while trying to kill your opponent by whatever means necessary – bomb, electrocution, giant boxing glove, huge spring…

Coming to a cliff top near you soon, an original game featuring the multiple deaths of hundreds of little furry animals in an explosive manner. Yes indeed, *Lemmings* by Psynogsis was ready to hit the shops in time for Christmas on Amiga and ST.

Rogue Trooper, long-time stalwart of the comic *2000 AD*, was the latest character to be converted into a computer game by Krisalis. The blue-skinned genetic infantryman takes on the Norts in what Krisalis promised to be a shoot-'em-up with ample scope for map creation. So that'll be a big game with lots of wandering and sporadic shooting then? Due out by the end of the month, it would be available for the Amiga and Atari ST.



» *Ghostbusters* (Mega Drive): It may have been six years since the film had been released but the franchise still had legs…

Tony Crowther, programmer of many an 8-bit classic, and who had been strangely quiet for several months, finally emerged from his lair to reveal his latest offering – an RPG game called *Captive* by Mindscape, again for the Amiga and ST.

For the consoles there was also news of an old timer returning to haunt the Sega Mega Drive. *Ghostbusters*, a huge hit on almost every system it was converted to, would be getting a makeover and appearing on Sega's new machine. Activision promised better graphics and gameplay and would retain Ray Parker Jnr's theme song. Top cheese.

Domark was also revelling in the news that it had acquired another handful of licensing agreements, this time for arcade conversions. Among its future projects were *Skull & Crossbones*, *Hydra* and *Thunderjaws*, with work ongoing on two other titles – *Race Drivin'*, a sequel to *Hard Drivin'*, and *Pit Fighter*.

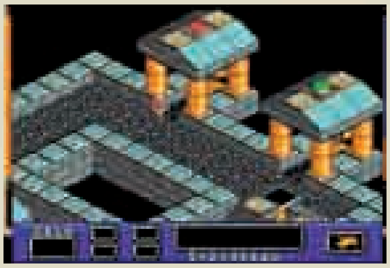
The arcade conversion theme ran as far as the monochrome Gameboy, with news that Taito was almost ready to release *Bubble Bobble* and *Chase HQ*. The lack of colour didn't affect the gameplay of either game.



» *Race Drivin'* (Amiga): Oh dear. Looked to be good, turned out terrible. Worse than the original (and that's saying something).



» *Last Ninja 3* (Commodore 64): A great game in its own right but still not a patch on *Last Ninja 2*.



» *Spindizzy Worlds* (Atari ST): Paul Shirley's original concept transferred well to the Atari ST and made for a terrific game.

1990

NOVEMBER NEWS



November proved to be a dream for Labour followers and *Spitting Image* producers. 22 November saw Margaret Thatcher resign from her position as Prime Minister after 11 years in charge.

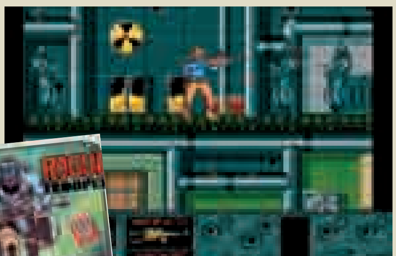
It came about after Sir Geoffrey Howe, the Deputy Prime Minister, resigned on the 13th of the month after criticising Thatcher's methods of governing. A week later a leadership election for the Conservative Party consisting of Thatcher and Defence Minister Michael Heseltine resulted in a failure for either to gain outright victory, although Thatcher was just four votes short of remaining Prime Minister and quelling calls for her to step down.

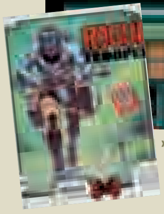
» After a busy day messing up the country there was nothing John Major fancied more than a nice hot Curry…

The leadership contest would have to go to a second round of voting, undermining Thatcher's position. Opposition leader, Neil Kinnock, demanded a General Election, while the Liberal Democrat leader, Paddy Ashdown, called for her to resign. Two days later, she did just that. Within a few hours of the news, two further candidates put their names forward to contest the leadership battle with Heseltine – Douglas Hurd and John Major. Mr Major won the race, taking the position of Prime Minister, which he held for seven years.



» John Major takes over from Margaret Thatcher as PM. He caringly points her towards the Jobcentre…





» *Rogue Trooper* (Amiga): After years of appallingly average *2000 AD*-licensed games, at last one with a hint of playability.



» *Spy vs. Spy* (NES): Hunt down your opponent while you search for the hidden objects. A simple – but excellent – two-player game.

The NES also welcomed two new games that would give your trigger finger a work-out. *NARC* followed the tried-and-tested gaming route of, if it moves shoot it, if it doesn't move give it a good kicking. Hot on *NARC*'s trail of violence was *Double Dragon 2: The Revenge*.

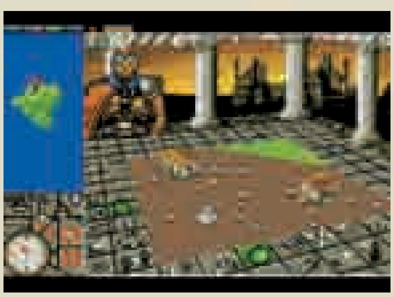
However, that was old news in Japan, where they were steadying themselves for the release of the third instalment – *Double Dragon 3: The Rosetta Stone*, on the Famicom.

'Ninjavitis' appeared to have also spread to System 3, famed for its *Last Ninja* games, with the revelation it was going to be releasing a third instalment alongside the *Last Ninja Remix* – essentially *Last Ninja 2* but with new music and a few extra ergonomic twiddly bits. The *Remix* version would be available across a wide selection of formats, with the third game appearing on Amiga, ST and C64.

In the reviews sections of *Computer & Video Games*, they firmly planted their C&VG Hit award on the lapels of a bumper crop of top gaming fodder. The recipients were *Dragon Breed* (Activision, Amiga), *Lotus Turbo Esprit Challenge* (Gremlin, Amiga), *Spindizzy II* (Activision, Atari ST), *Badlands* (Domark, Amiga/ST) ,*Vaxine* (US Gold, Amiga/ST), *Moonwalker* (Sega, Megadrive), *Klax* (Tengen, PC Engine), *The Immortal* (Electronic Arts, Amiga), *Mean Streets* (US Gold/Access, Atari ST), *The Spy Who Loved Me* (Domark, Amiga) and *Voodoo Nightmare* (Palace, Amiga).

Its sister magazine, *Mean Machines* was on its second issue and dishing out its Mega Game award to *Strider* (Sega, Mega Drive), *Populous* (Bullfrog/Electronic Arts, Mega Drive) and *Rainbow Islands* (Taito, Mega Drive).

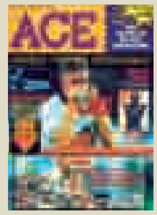
The reviews that earned the Zero Hero stamp of approval in *Zero* magazine were *SWIV* (Storm, Amiga), *Lotus Turbo Esprit Challenge* (Gremlin, Atari ST), *Powermonger* (Bullfrog/Electronic Arts, Amiga/ST), *4D Sports Boxing* (Mindscape, PC), *Saint Dragon* (Storm, Amiga), *Indy 500* (Electronic Arts, Amiga), with the top Console Classic awards going to *Super Monaco Grand Prix* (Sega, Mega Drive) and *Devil Crash* (Irem, PC Engine).



» *Powermonger* (Amiga): Although not the easiest game to get into, *Powermonger* was still one of the best God sims around.

THIS MONTH IN…

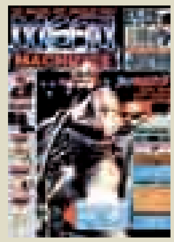
ACE



ACE took a look at the Evans & Sutherland flight simulators as used by military organisations across the world. Touting realistic combat conditions and superb graphics, *ACE* asked whether we would be playing games like these in the year 2000. Judging by the graphics, the Dreamcast looked to have it licked, let alone a PlayStation 3.



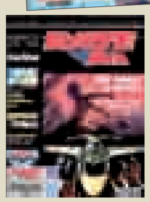
MEAN MACHINES



Two reviews – one game. *Fire & Forget II* for the Master System and Amstrad GX4000. The SMS version was excellent. The GX4000 version, however, was awful with reviewers commenting on the jerky graphics and hopeless animation.



RAZE



Raze issue 1 had a feature called Hot Slots looking at new arcade games that could be arriving on UK shores from the Far East. The new games featured included G-LOC, complete with its mammoth R360 rotating cabinet, Smash TV, Pit Fighter and a curiously named game called Pigskin. Pork Scratching Simulator anyone?



CHARTS

NOVEMBER 1990

AMIGA



1 Corporation (Core Design)
2 Shadow Of The Beast 2 (Psygnosis)
3 Operation Stealth (US Gold/Delphine)
4 Shadow Warriors (Ocean)
5 Wings (Mirrorsoft/ Cinemaware)



ATARI ST

1 F-19 Stealth Fighter (Microprose)
2 Their Finest Hours (US Gold/Lucasfilm)
3 Shadow Warriors (Ocean)
4 Operation Stealth (US Gold/Delphine)
5 Midnight Resistance (Ocean)



NES

1 Super Mario Bros. 2 (Nintendo)
2 Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link (Nintendo)
3 The Legend Of Zelda (Nintendo)
4 Super Mario Bros. (Nintendo)
5 Castlevania II: Simon's Quest (Konami)

SEGA MASTER SYSTEM

1 Golden Axe (Sega)
2 Chase HQ (Sega/Taito)
3 Operation Wolf (Sega/Taito)
4 Battle Out Run (Sega)
5 Double Dragon (Sega/Technos)



SPINDIZZY

IT'S SPIN DIZZY, NOT SKIN DISEASE



- **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRIC DREAMS
- **RELEASED:** 1986
- **GENRE:** PUZZLE/PLATFORMER
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** AMSTRAD CPC, COMMODORE 64, ZX SPECTRUM
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+



HISTORY

Few games match the infuriating with the brilliant, but Paul Shirley's utterly excellent *Spindizzy* easily manages to do so.

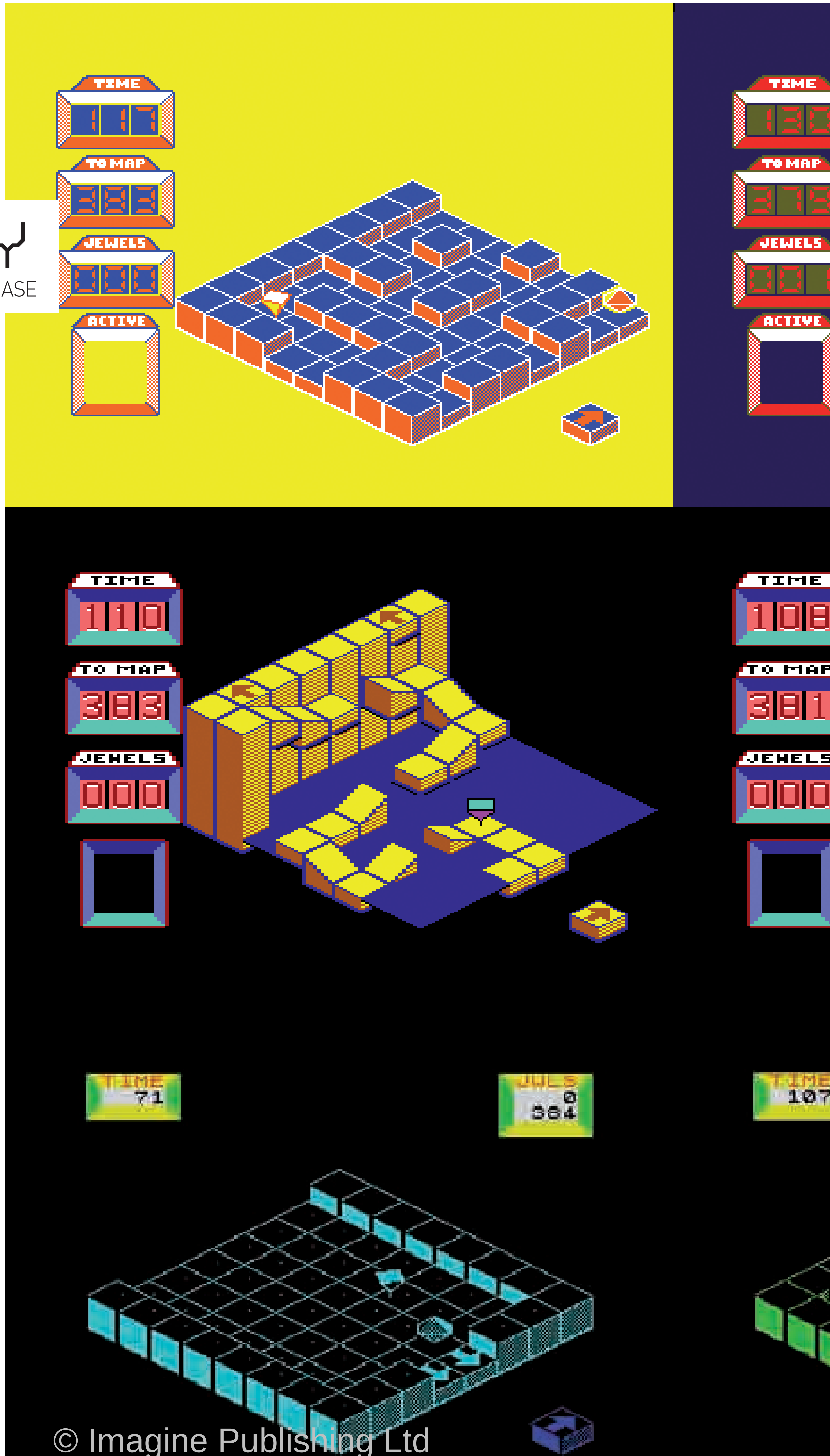
Despite its incredibly simple premise – negate a huge maze and acquire the 381 gems that have been placed there – its masterful level design, cunningly designed puzzles and constantly diminishing time limit meant that Shirley's creation earned an army of fans, and rightly so.

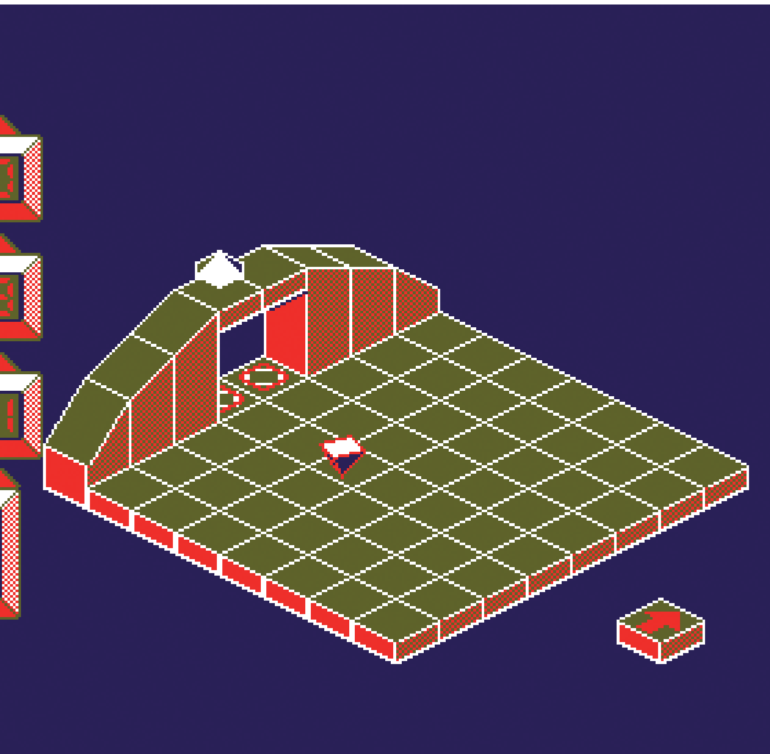
With just 107 seconds on the clock when you start your first game, you're immediately up against an insanely tight time limit, and while it's possible to earn an extra ten seconds for every gem you collect, a precious five are lost whenever you fall off *Spindizzy*'s beautifully abstract game world. And the reason for those lost seconds? Simple, Shirley's devious puzzles and GERALD's built-in inertia, which meant that as well as battling against the clock, you were constantly fighting against the harsh and irregular environment. Travel too far in one direction and it would take a little while before coming to a complete stop; fine on flat open surfaces, but *Spindizzy*'s world was one that constantly challenged you due to its steep inclines, narrow passages and open jumps.

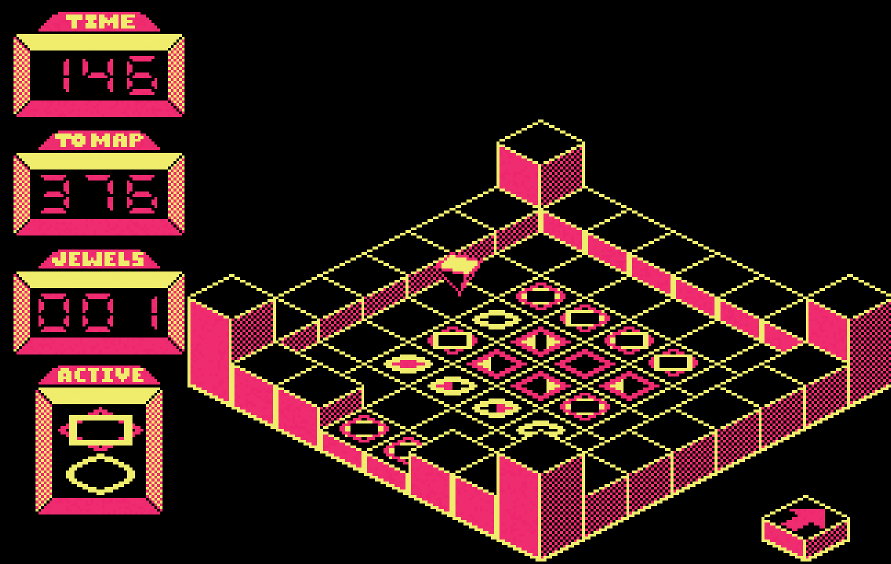
Yes, it was infuriating to begin with, but when you did careen off the side of a ramp or platform it was always because of your own greed, so you could never become angry at Shirley's clever construction.

That didn't mean that plenty of swearing wouldn't ensue when a hard section had to be navigated, but the sensation of gratification you felt made those nail-biting sections more than worth it. Fortunately, GERALD (Gyroscopic Environmental Reconnaissance And Land Mapping Device) was able to change between three distinct forms, which in turn increase/decrease his momentum. As a result you'll need to flip through all three forms to complete the huge challenge Shirley set.

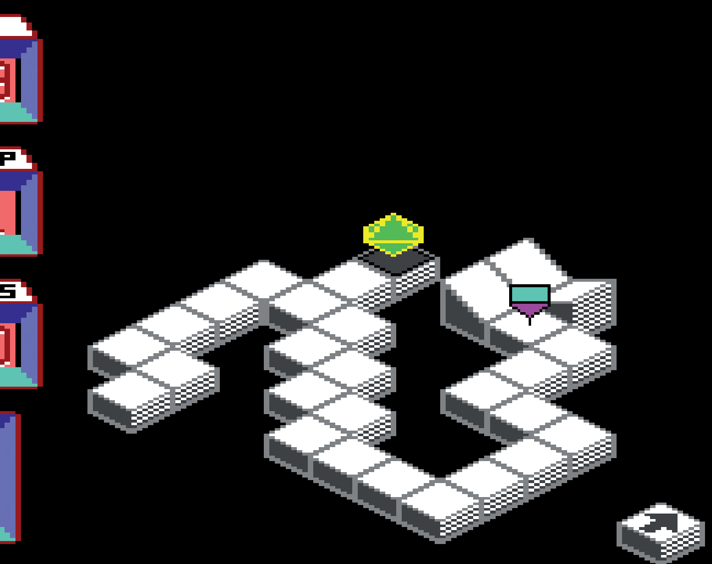
We may not have come close to finishing it, but that hasn't stopped us continually trying for the last two decades… A timeless classic.

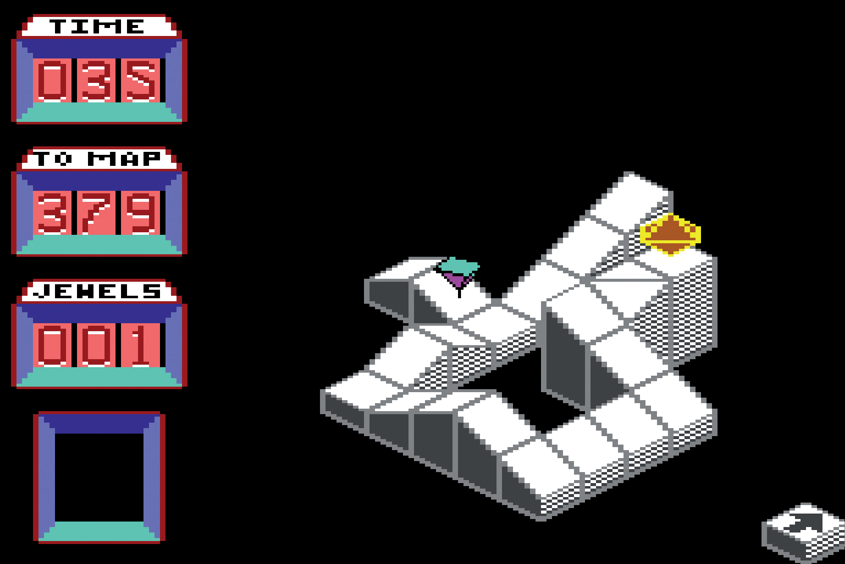




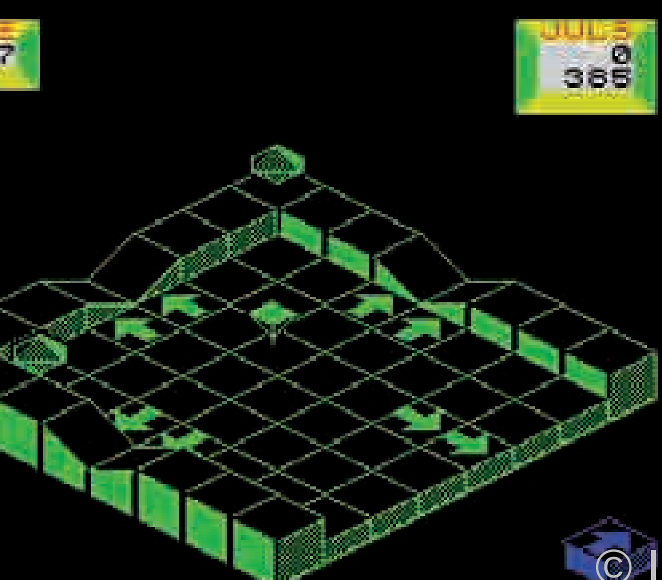


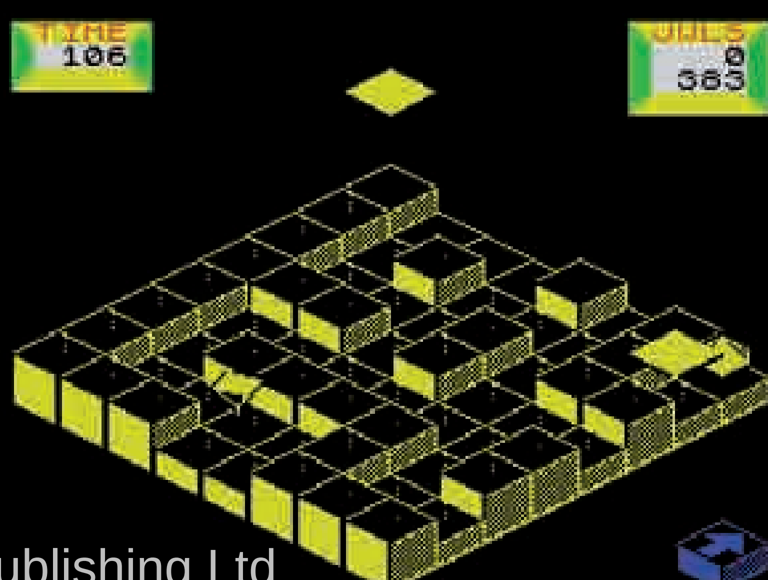
TIME
146
TO MAP
376
JEWELS
001
ACTIVE





TIME
035
TO MAP
379
JEWELS
001





TIME
106



THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF

STAR WARS

VIDEOGAMES

EPISODE I

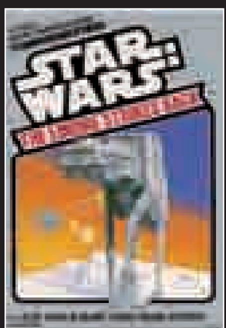
When *Star Wars* was released in 1977 no one, least of all George Lucas, expected the impact the film would have. Inspired by his love for serial TV show *Flash Gordon,* it's believed that bringing *Flash* to the big screen was initially Lucas's objective.

But when the King Features deal didn't go to plan, George instead began penning his own 'space opera'. Taking inspiration from literature (Asimov and Tolkien), cinema (Akira Kurosawa's *The Hidden Fortress* and Kubrick's *2001*) and Eastern cultures and teachings (the ways of the Samurai and the theory of Chi) he would culminate these elements, special effects and some cheesy dialogue into a cinematic epic that would capture the minds and imaginations of generations, for generations. Join Stuart Hunt as he traverses a well-visited galaxy far, far away and takes a retrospective look at the ongoing saga that is the *Star Wars* videogame.



THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF STAR WARS

THE PARKER SERIES

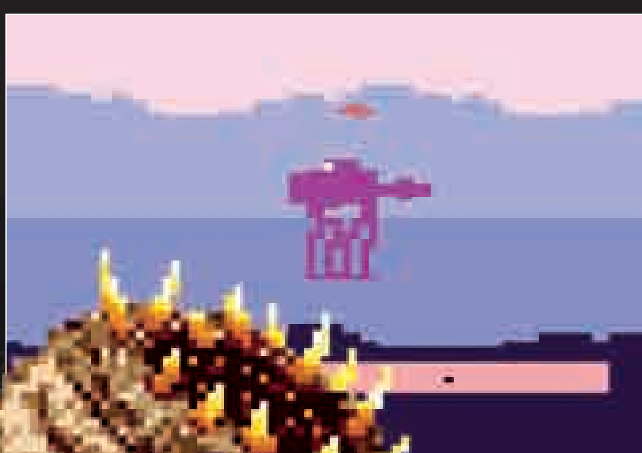


STAR WARS: THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

RELEASED: 1982
FORMAT: ATARI 2600
ALSO ON: INTELLIVISON

Released by board game manufacturer Parker Bros, *The Empire Strikes Back* built a brilliant little twitch shoot-'em-up around the film's memorable Rebel escape scene at Hoth. With a continuous convoy of lumbering AT-ATs for you to destroy, it was your job, as Luke inside a snowspeeder, to fire an obscene amount of bullets (48!) into fibrous Walkers or patiently wait for a flashing weak spot to appear in one of three different locales on their bodies to topple them in one shot.

Like the movie, Luke's snowspeeder could only fly through the fragile legs of the AT-ATs, with waist-high collisions resulting in instant death for Luke but, as a payoff, would also sap quite a bit of energy from the camel-looking sprites. Even the Force pops up as an invincibility power-up that's awarded for surviving two minutes of the game without dying. It was also possible to regenerate your shields (twice per ship) by landing on a nice piece of unsullied flat ground. While *Empire* didn't look much, behind the basic looks is a surprisingly immersive *Star Wars* game. It's just a shame that Parker wouldn't keep that momentum going.





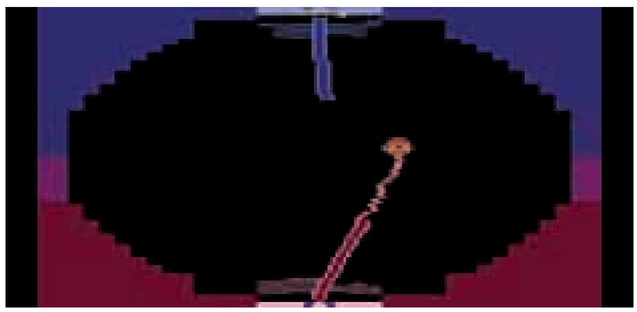
STAR WARS: JEDI ARENA

RELEASED: 1983
FORMAT: ATARI 2600

The thought of finally being able to wield a Lightsaber and hear your 2600 make intentional 'wharrrming' and crashing sounds had all the ingredients to make any child wearing *Star Wars* pyjamas spontaneously combust on the spot. However, what we actually got with *Star Wars: Jedi Arena* was a peculiar game that played and looked like a pissing contest between two men in adjacent toilet cubicles.

Loosely based on a training scene from *Episode IV*, where we catch Luke fending off a training sphere with his Lightsaber, *Jedi Arena* allowed you to compete against the computer, or a friend, in an annoyingly constrained Lightsaber duel. By manically hitting fire, the central floating orb would shoot a bolt of lightning at your opponent in the direction your Lightsaber was facing. Both Jedi had a shield of sprites, which had to be whittled down using the orb's blasts, with the aim being to create an opening in their shield with which to deliver the final blow.

Despite being a novel use of the *Star Wars* licence that seemed to twist knowingly at the nipples of popular Atari 2600 games such as *Breakout* and *Warlords*, *Jedi Arena* just felt a bit too untidy, a little flawed and, as such, is widely regarded as one of the worst games in Parker's *Star Wars* series. 'But there is another'.

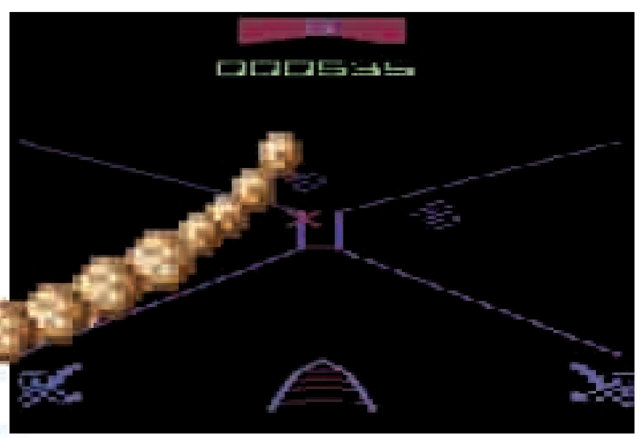


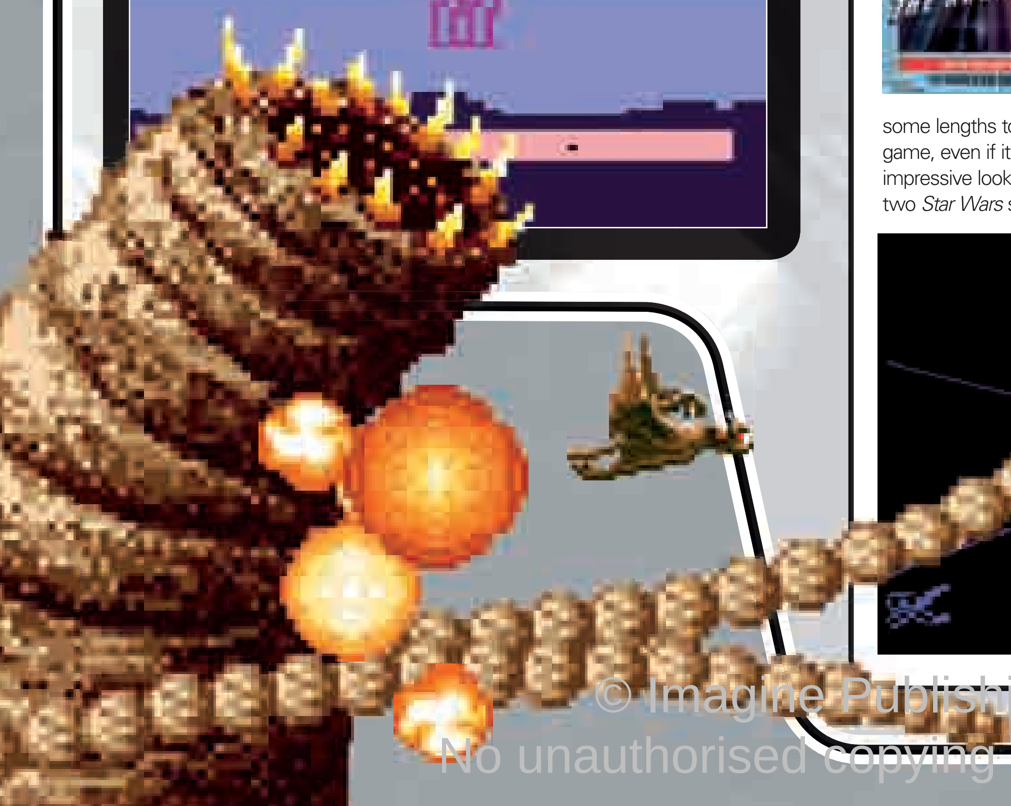


STAR WARS: THE ARCADE GAME

RELEASED: 1983
FORMAT: ATARI 2600, 5200
ALSO ON: 5200, ZX SPECTRUM, CPC, C64, AMIGA, ATARI ST, DOS, COLECOVISION

Yes Ripley, believe it or not Parker would try to cram the entire *Star Wars Arcade* game into a 2600 cart. Sure, chunky regimented sprites replaced the arcade's clinical vector lines, and the cross-hair controls were a little smacky, but all the levels were there and the game did go some lengths to instil the feeling that you were playing the Atari arcade game, even if it was as flickery as hell. This decent effort by Parker is an impressive looking 2600 beast. It does right the wrongs of the previous two *Star Wars* shamers but it's still not perfect.







STAR WARS: DEATH STAR BATTLE

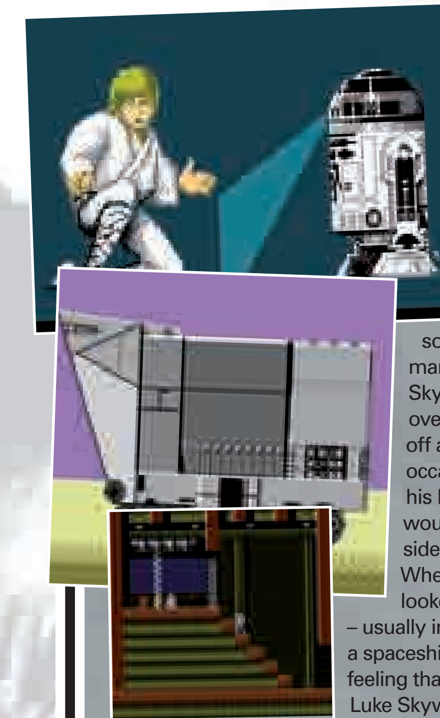
RELEASED: 1983
FORMAT: ATARI 2600, A800
ALSO ON: 5200, ZX SPECTRUM

This abysmal Star *Wars* game – rushed out to cash in on the popularity of *Return Of The Jedi* – shoehorns the climax of *Episode VI* into a poor *Asteroids* clone. The first thing that grates about *Death Star Battle* is Parker's ridiculous decision to condense the action into half the screen by cordoning it off with an annoying rainbow force field. As you can imagine, this makes for a pretty claustrophobic experience, helped none by seeing your enemies appearing from out of nowhere, some ships registering collisions with your ship while TIE fighters choose not to bother and an unfinished Death Star lurking at the top of the screen occasionally firing green lines of death at you.

The aim of *Death Star Battle* was to destroy the second Death Star by flying the Millennium Falcon into a mysterious wormhole that periodically appeared on an annoying force field. Doing so would cause your 2600 to do something quite spectacular and plonk you in front of the Death Star where you then prep your assault. Here you had to chip away at the pixels that made up the unfinished Death Star, à la *Yars' Revenge*, and then try to hit the most diminutive and annoying weak spot in the entire annals of videogames: four 2600 sprites clumped together. And yes, it proves as annoyingly as it sounds. Typically, once the Death Star was obliterated, the game would loop back to the first section of the game and the banality would continue.



NAMCO STAR WARS



This rare *Star Wars* game from Namco would become somewhat of an unknown among many *Star Wars* fans. With Luke Skywalker running and jumping over obstacles and fending off all manner of made-up and occasional wholesaled enemy with his Lightsaber, Namco *Star Wars* would mark the first in a wave of side-scrolling *Star Wars* games. Where Atari and Parker's style looked to take elements from the film – usually involving flying and fighting in a spaceship – in a bid to try to impart the feeling that you were prising the roles of Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, Chewbacca and so on, the intention now, pioneered (very loosely) by Namco, was to let you play out an entire episode of the movie, from start to finish.

Where this game will probably struggle with hardcore *Star Wars* fans is Namco's candid disregard for integral *Star Wars* plots. Given that the game starts out in Tatooine with the feral Jawas kidnapping R2, it seems that the chaps at Namco watched five minutes of *Star Wars* before getting utterly bored and booting up some random platform game about fighting frogs somewhere in Egypt.

Namco also decided to entrust Luke with the power of the Force by taking a leaf (quite literally) out of *Mega Man*'s second book, and having the Jedi's mind-bending powers take the form of seven different interchangeable powers that could be channelled via the pause menu to make Skywalker fly, run faster and jump higher.

With stubby Stormtroopers, *Mario*-style bricks, and a jarring underwater level that finds Luke donning breathing apparatus (why not just opt for made-up gills, Namco?), the game certainly has 'artistic licensed dripped NES side-scrolling platform game' stamped all over it. But for everything Namco *Star Wars* gets so horribly wrong when it comes to attention to detail – Darth Vader turning into a giant scorpion with the head of Bubsy the Bobcat, Luke with black hair – what lies behind this rare and highly sought-after Famicom game is imaginative level design, lovely graphics and essentially a blueprint for the prevailing JVC *Star Wars* games that would follow.

> **"Namco Star Wars would be the first in a wave of side-scrolling Star Wars games"**

STAR WARS: BATTLE FOR ENDOR

RELEASED: 1983
FORMAT: ATARI 2600

Sadly, one of Parker's best *Star Wars* games never actually found a 2600 release. Stumbled across at the turn of the millennium (spooky), this prototype for a game based on hang-gliding Ewoks was unearthed. The game has since been made available for play via ROM and despite it feeling somewhat unfinished, it's not all bad news. *Battle For Endor* is based loosely around the events of *Return Of The Jedi* and finds you controlling a lowly Ewok perched from a grey hang-glider. Gameplay basically consists of dodging trees and lobbing super powerful rocks at stormtroopers and AT-ST's that look like Scream Halloween masks.

The aim of the game was to commander the black imperial speeder bikes that occasionally darted towards you and then fly into the shield generator in some weird Ewok kamikaze mission. Boasting impressive looking explosions, smooth scrolling, shadowing and even a convincing hang-gliding control physic, whereby quickly decreasing in altitude seems to make you go faster (which we're sure wasn't any kind of fluke on Parker's part), this is certainly the best looking *Star Wars* game that could've appeared on the Atari.



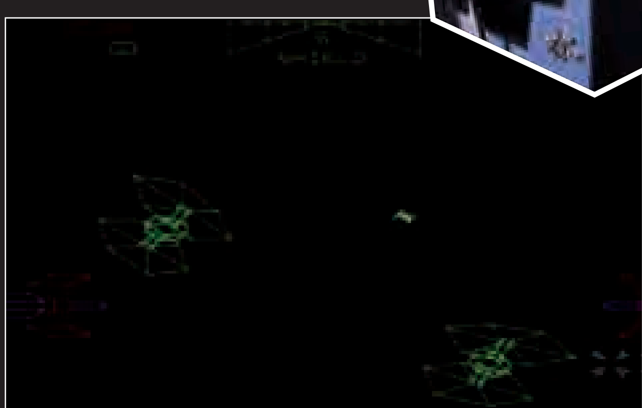
"While Empire didn't look much, behind the basic looks is a surprisingly immersive Star Wars game"

STAR WARS

RELEASED: 1983
FORMAT: ARCADE
ALSO ON: ATARI 2600, 5200, ZX SPECTRUM, CPC, C64, AMIGA, ATARI ST, DOS, COLECOVISION

Released around the time that cinema-goers were getting their final slice of *Star Wars* cinema with *Return Of The Jedi*, this first *Star Wars* game to be released in arcades would hark back a massive six years to the first movie, but that wouldn't dampen the piquancy of the game one bit. As well as imparting the sensation that you were piloting an actual X-wing, through some clever sticker decals, handlebar controls and having a first-person perspective to the action, Atari also cleverly littered the game with emotive cinema triggers: John Williams' strident score (so to speak), digitised speech taken straight from the movie (sort of) and it also borrowed three iconic scenes from the film. Beginning with Luke's daring approach to the Space Station, leading into you destroying the excitable towers from the surface of the Death Star before finally getting the chance to relive the climatic trench battle where a timely proton shot (actually two if you're being overly pernickety) is fired in the exhaust port causing the destruction of the Death Star. And when the planetary target was finally destroyed the game simply looped back to the beginning again like you were Bill Murray, it was *Groundhog Day* and your cash was Andie MacDowell.





RETURN OF THE JEDI



RELEASED: 1984
FORMAT: ARCADE
ALSO ON: C64, CPC, SPECTRUM

Given that the first *Star Wars* game was released alongside the release of *Return Of The Jedi*, LucasArts figured it'd try to capitalise on the hysteria of the last film by ignoring the events of *The Empire Strikes Back* and rolling with a colourful and rubbish isometric shoot-'em-up based on *Jedi* instead.

Similar to games like *Zaxxon* and *Highway Encounter*, Atari scrapped the popular vector graphics of the first arcade game and replaced them with colourful and detailed raster graphics. Again, setting the action across scenes from the movie, you began your return to Jedi-ing by first guiding Princess Leia through the forest of Endor and drawing chasing stormtroopers into Ewok traps, shutting down the shield generator in the AT-ST with Chewy, flying the Millennium Falcon across the Star Destroyer and destroying and escaping the second Death Star.

Despite some vibrant looking visuals, the game suffered from linear gameplay, tetchy controls, and a collision detection that liked to play practical jokes. The final kick in the Ewoks is Atari's maddening level design, which includes such gameplay greats as forcing you to dodge trees at breakneck speeds against a green backdrop, and an infamously bewildering stage that randomly cuts from you blasting the Imperials in outer space in the Falcon to blasting them in Endor in the AT-ST, which might've worked in the movie, but in a videogame kind of imparts the sensation that you're experiencing some kind of boorish flashbacks from the Vietnam War.







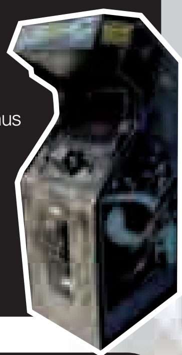
STAR WARS: THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

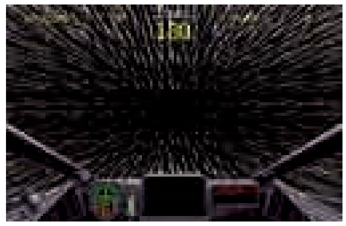
RELEASED: 1985
FORMAT: ARCADE
ALSO ON: ATARI 2600, C64, AMIGA, ST

For Empire Strikes *Back* Atari went back to the vectors for two reasons: first, *Return Of The Jedi* arcade was the gaming equivalent of paying someone from Atari to come to your house, spin you on a swivel chair and punch your sister in the jaw, and second it let Atari make further use of the original *Star Wars* arcade chipset that had raked in so much money to begin with.

Because the game was built from the same neon lines as *Star Wars Arcade* it meant arcade operators – with the aid of some giant stickers – could convert their old cigarette-stained *Star Wars* cabs to play Atari's latest. The biggest problem with *Empire*, however, is that while the black-vector look worked well to create the sensation of being in space; it wasn't as successful in re-creating the sensation of tripping up AT-AT's in the white frothy snow of Hoth. Also, the game only charts the rebels escape act of the film. So, while the movie boasted an epic and jaw-dropping finale, the same couldn't be said for its arcade brethren, which petered out into a TIE fighter skirmish that ends with Han and troupe's escape into the asteroid belt.

What *Empire* did introduce, however, was the 'stripes' bonus that was awarded to the player for shooting down a specific amount of enemies. Doing so would earn you a letter per level, which they used like Smarties lids to spell 'JEDI'. This would then momentarily disable enemy cannons and could be traded for stripes to put against your name if you were good enough to glean a spot on the game's high-score table.





STAR WARS ARCADE

RELEASED: 1993
FORMAT: ARCADE
ALSO ON: 32X

After an eight year absence, with the help of Sega's System 1 arcade board, *Star Wars* would make a glorious-looking return to the arcade circuit, in a game that would retain its arcade heritage of keeping the action firmly in the skies. *Star Wars Arcade* shares a lot of similarities with Atari's original arcade game but simply coats the vectors with broad-looking 3D polygons. Two players could assume the role of gunner and pilot and opt to pilot either an X-wing over three sequences confusingly set around *Return Of The Jedi*. The first stage sees Luke battling TIE fighters inside an asteroid field, the second destroying the Super Star Destroyer (much to relief of Admiral Akbar) and the finale ended with a familiar assault on the Death Star.

Star Wars Arcade was ported to the 32X a year later, in a game which lacked some of the visual finesse from the arcade original. However, Sega would try to compensate the fact by adding some extra stages to the game. As a result, *Star Wars Arcade* became both a launch title and the first killer-app for the much maligned Mega Drive add-on.



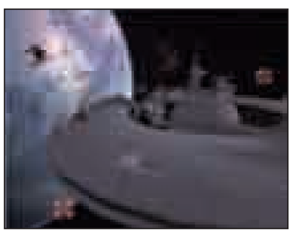




STAR WARS TRILOGY ARCADE

RELEASED: 1998
FORMAT: ARCADE

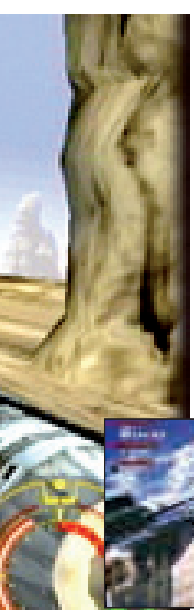
This System 3 powerhouse was touted as a follow up to *Star Wars Arcade*. *Star Wars Trilogy* gave the player the chance to play through a cut-down first trilogy: an impressive and astonishing looking Death Star skirmish lifted from *A New Hope*, the Rebel's escape from Hoth and a three-tiered stage charting the Rebel victory at Endor in *Return Of The Jedi*. The game finishes with Luke destroying the second Death Star inside an X-wing. Permeating the dog-fighting stages were two first-person bonus stages that included a duel between Boba Fett and another with Lord Vader. Switching the action from an on-rails cockpit blaster to Luke's on-rails eye sockets, the arcade joystick would be used to control either a cross hair to blast away the Imperials or a virtual Ligthtsaber to parry Fett's blaster shots and Vader's Lightsaber attacks. Sadly, *Star Wars Arcade* never found a home port. However, considering the System 3 racing game *Scud Race* was originally planned for a Dreamcast release and *Star Wars Arcade* found a release on the 32X, it's probable that Sega may have envisioned an eventual DC release for the game if the console had fared better in the console war.



STAR WARS STARFIGHTER

RELEASED: 2003
FORMAT: ARCADE

If you say *Star Wars Starfighter* to most people, they'll think back to the PS2 and Xbox arcade aerial combat games released by LucasArts. But there was another game under the same name that found its way into arcades two years later. Putting you in the shoes of a rookie Starfighter pilot, and with a faithful R2 unit as co-pilot, it was your job to prevent the invasion of Naboo by infiltrating and destroying numerous Trade Federation ships through five levels that stretched across space, the vast plains of Naboo and inside the corridors of a Droid Control ship. We'd love to tell you if it was any good, but sadly we haven't played it.

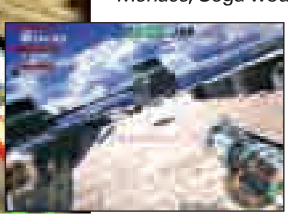


STAR WARS: RACER ARCADE

RELEASED: 2000
FORMAT: ARCADE
ALSO ON: N64, DC, GBA

Based on The *Phantom Menace*'s saving CGI grace, this colossal beast from Sega, running from its Haikaru board, set out to re-create Anakin's exhilarating Pod Race in Tatooine. Peculiarly released on home consoles first, initially on the N64 and PC and followed up with ports to the DC and as a feeble top-down racer on the GBC, this peculiar arcade reboot – owing to its sheer gigantism – would come to strike a menacing pose in arcades when it was released. Re-creating the Boonta Eve Classic in *Phantom Menace*, Sega would focus on trying to replicate the exhilaration that Lucas projected brilliantly on cinema screens. Choosing to play as either the young Anakin Skywalker or Sebulba (though two other pilots could be unlocked in the game), *Racer Arcade* adopted a weird, but perfectly workable, dual-throttle steering system making it a frenetic, but enjoyable, racing game that is one of the best games to come out of the first three episodes.





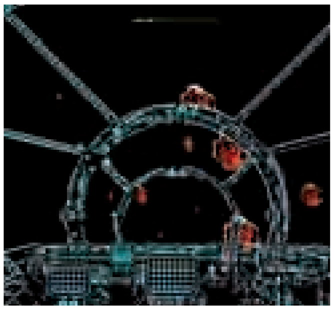


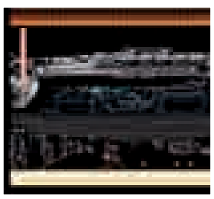
THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF

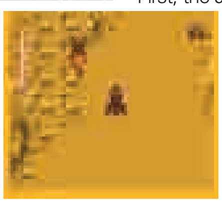
STAR WARS

THE JVC SERIES

STAR WARS





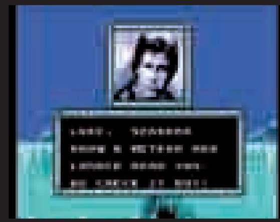


RELEASED: 1992
FORMAT: NES

Often mistaken as being a weird remixed Western version of Namco's *Star Wars* game (see 'Namco Star Wars' boxout), JVC's take on *Episode IV* may look very similar to its Eastern sibling, but it's actually a very different feeling game altogether. First, the JVC iteration – although still taking a few liberties with the plot – does share more common ground with the movie. Beginning with Luke in his landspeeder chugging across the dunes of Tatooine to find R2, the game then leads Luke to Mos Eisley and into Cantina Bar where he has to blast the faces off some debased alien revellers. The level ends with a conversation with Han Solo that gives the impression that Luke – despite almost getting his ass handed to him at the bar in the movie – gallantly saves Han from a band of bounty hunters and in gratitude is taken to Alderaan. The quick-fire Solo then becomes a playable member of your party, and when the pair eventually free the captured Princess she also becomes a playable character.

The biggest oversight by JVC though is that its version has no Chewbacca and more worryingly no Darth Vader, with all evidence that the Sith Lord ever existed confusingly wiped from the game's story. The final trench battle, brilliantly re-created in the arcade game, is also shabbily re-created with an overhead X-wing section that smacks of *Return Of The Jedi*'s twitchy gameplay.

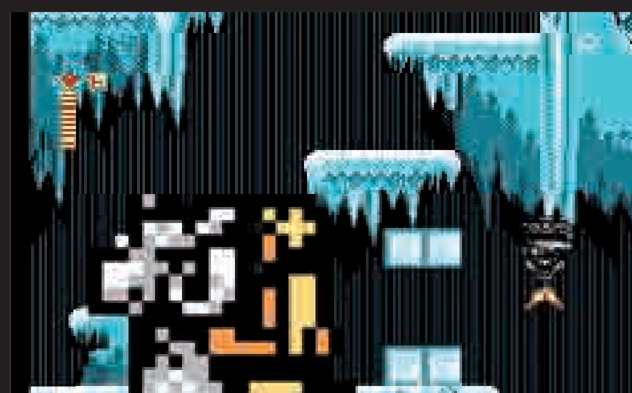
STAR WARS: THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

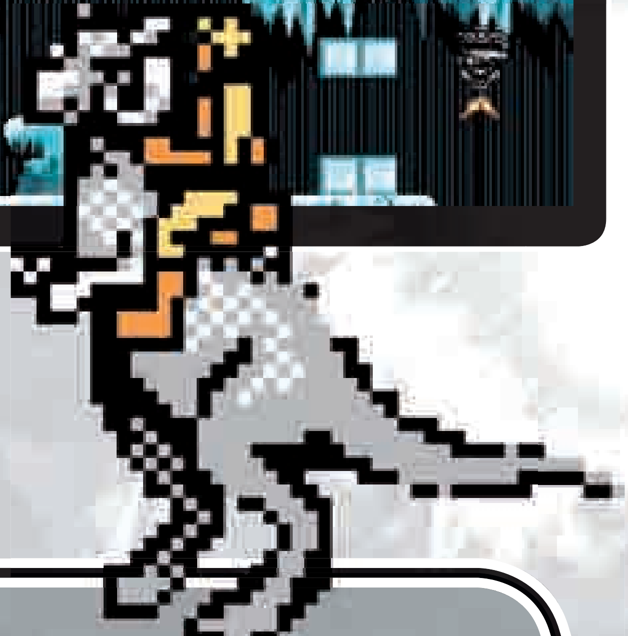


RELEASED: 1993
FORMAT: NES, GAME BOY

Released late in the machine's life, *The Empire Strikes Back* moved away from the squishy and cartoon look of the first two NES outings and opted to breathe a little more style and accuracy into proceedings. Luke finally drops his boyish look for a mature and slender-looking sprite, and many of the key elements from the film are lovingly re-mastered without the confusing story fudging.

Ignoring the glaring fact that towards the end of the game you actually save Han Solo in an X-wing versus Slave 1 dogfight, therefore nullifying the entire first section of *Return Of The Jedi*, the game stays relatively faithful to the events of the film. Luke has to tie up some Walkers in a level that's structured very similarly to Parker's *Empire Strikes Back*, has unfinished Jedi training with Yoda where he duels with both Phantom Vader and then faces the bona fide Vader in a re-creation of the film's epic cliffhanger climax inside the Freezing Chamber. The game also marks a return to Luke using the Force with the difference here being that instead of accessing the powers through the pause menu, as in Namco *Star Wars*, Luke can only use his powers when he finds various Force power-ups that are scattered around each level.



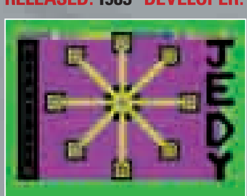


THE CLONE BORES

We take a look at some of the lamest examples of trying to cash in on the Star Wars licence ever. George, if you're reading this, it's probably best if you just turn the page buddy

RETURN OF THE JEDY

RELEASED: 1983 **DEVELOPER:** MK CIRCUITS



This game of repetitive Vader standoffs involves rotating a 'laser bolt craft' around eight lanes of potential threat that made up the 'Jedy Games Arena'. Shooting Vader before he has the chance to get a shot off on you were good times; blasting the harmless R2 into little pieces were not. Highly repetitive and yet strangely hypnotic, *Return Of The Jedy*'s basically the most primitive version of *Tempest* you're ever likely to find and shamefully bases its duffness around two *Star Wars* characters.

3D STAR WARS

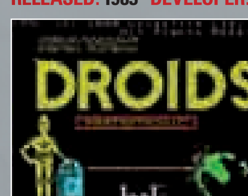
RELEASED: 1983 **DEVELOPER:** ELFIN SOFTWARE



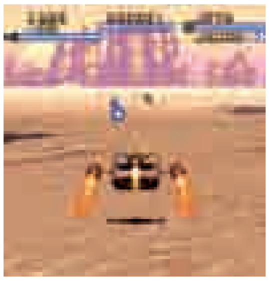
Possibly the most confusing first-person space shmup ever made, *3D Star Wars* puts you in the role of Luke Skywalker, who's trying to repel and destroy ten waves of Rebel fleets (erm, the Rebels were the good guys). Anyway, after a quick tutorial that tells you what the different areas on your radar hub are called, but not what they do, the game lets you shoot at a screen of jittery star looking things for the rest of your life – which might look rather pretty, but has bugger all to do with *Star Wars*.

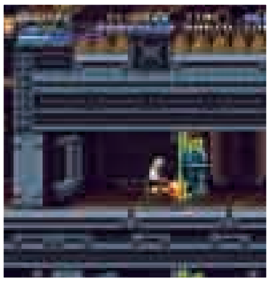
STAR WARS DROIDS

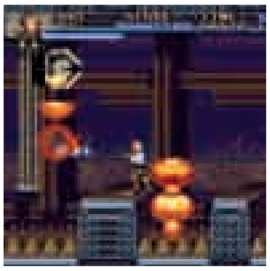
RELEASED: 1983 **DEVELOPER:** MASTERTRONIC

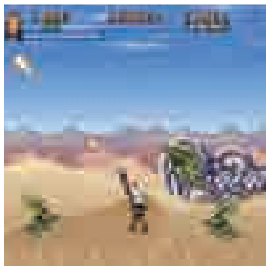


Star Wars Droids was a naff computer game spin-off of a naff cartoon spin-off of the same name. Boasting the most annoying control system, *Star Wars Droids* allowed you to boss around R2 and C-3PO inside a lame side-scrolling do-'em-up. Yep, opening doors, throwing rocks and basically getting mind-numbingly bored out of your skull were just some of the delights that awaited you after purchasing this lame budget game from Binary Design.









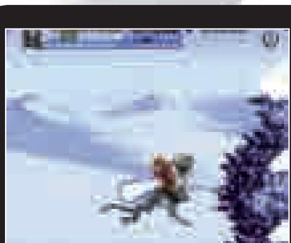
SUPER STAR WARS

RELEASED: 1993
FORMAT: SNES

For many of our youngish readers, *Super Star Wars* will mark the first time they ever came to play a *Star Wars* game. JVC's *Super Star Wars* would become an integral third-party Super Nintendo armament in the 16-bit console war for Nintendo. Forgetting for a moment that the game was based on one third of a very popular trilogy of films, what really appeased people about *Super Star Wars* was that it was simply a brilliant run-'n'-gun action game. We don't mind admitting that some members of the **RG** team had played through all three *Super Star Wars* games before even sniffing at the films. JVC didn't lazily rest its laurels on the heritage and appeal of the films, it would simply refine what it had done previously on the NES and ensure, this time, that the trilogy would finally be complete. God knows why *Super Star Wars* never made it into our top 25 run-'n'-gun list, because after booting the thing up again recently its brilliance really has stood the test of time. Parallax-scrolling, fulsome palettes and now stereo sound bleating sections of Williams' majestic score would heighten the *Star Wars* experience like no other movie tie-in game before it. Sure, cursory 'super' changes and artistic licence occurred, like Luke Skywalker facing a 'super' Womp Rat, 'super' Sarlacc Pit Monster, erm 'super' Star Destroyer bosses (erm, maybe not), but the game would try to patch things up with Chewy by making him a playable character alongside Han and would also brilliantly use the machine's Mode 7 capabilities with *F-Zero*-style spaceship sections. The game is often cited as being a bit of a pad-biting beast, with maddening jumps and respawning enemies the game certainly poses quite a challenge, but those criticisms were nothing compared to the next *Super Star Wars* game that would follow.



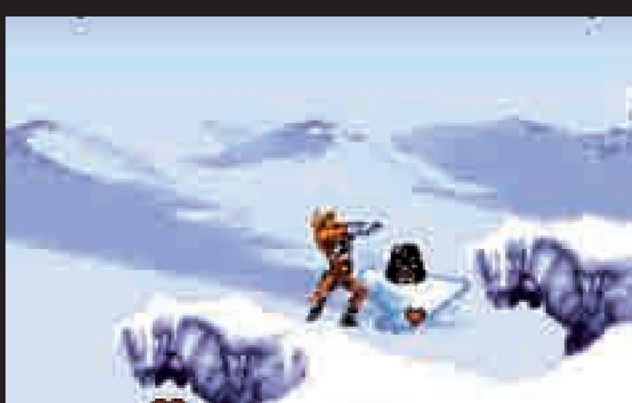
"Parallax-scrolling, fulsome palettes and stereo sound bleating out Williams' majestic score would heighten the Star Wars experience like no other movie tie-in before it"



SUPER STAR WARS: THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

RELEASED: 1994
FORMAT: SNES

There was high expectation for *Super Empire Strikes Back* to really build on the brilliance of *Super Star Wars* and deliver SNES owners the ultimate *Star Wars* videogame experience. Thankfully, JVC and LucasArts had the foresight to keep the gameplay relatively similar to the first but would also decide to crank up the already tortuous difficulty (many believe this game to be the hardest in the series) and stretch it through some pretty tiresome stages – hence why this is the first *Star Wars* game to incorporate a password save system. On the plus side *Empire* would up the ante on the Mode 7 sections and add 'Force powers' and adopt the earlier NES style of splitting the Force into practical powers. Staying relatively faithful to the events and scenes of the film, for many fans, *Empire* would capture the sequel's darker undertone brilliantly.







SUPER STAR WARS: RETURN OF THE JEDI

RELEASED: 1995
FORMAT: SNES

Finally JVC would get the chance to put an end to its dwindling side-scrolling *Star Wars* series. The best-looking game in the *Super* series is also the worst. There's a real sense that JVC and LucasArts were simply getting a little lazy by the time *Return Of The Jedi* was due for *Super* treatment. Here they're simply ticking all the same boxes, but trying to conceal the fact by adding a few little nods – the film's dropped Asumian Skiff Garr boss and dressing Leia in her bra and pants – to put a geek smile across a few fanboy faces. *Return Of The Jedi* added two more playable characters to the game roster with Princess Leia and the Ewok Wicket. Where the game falls down hard, however, is its truly shambolic Mode 7 sections, which include the ugliest looking speeder bike chase imaginable, which gives the impression the scene was filmed in an alleyway of moss (seriously, *3D Deathcase* puts it to visual shame), a bemusing and annoying first level that charts Luke's journey to Jabba's hut, and an infamous (for all the wrong reasons) Millennium Falcon finale that acts as a morose curtain call for both the *Super Star Wars* series and poor old Mode 7. Retaining *Empire*'s password system, *Super Return Of The Jedi* would also keep the series' instantly steep difficulty curve, and pave itself with fidgety stages and taxing boss battles. While it could at least swank yet another worthy challenge for any wannabe Jedi, like the movies, it would be considered by many to be the weakest of the trilogy.

Next issue we take a look at *Star Wars*' exhaustive PC and handheld series, and discover how the advent of a new trilogy in a new generation of consoles would come to cause a real disturbance in the force.



THE COMPLETE LIST OF STAR WARS VIDEOGAMES

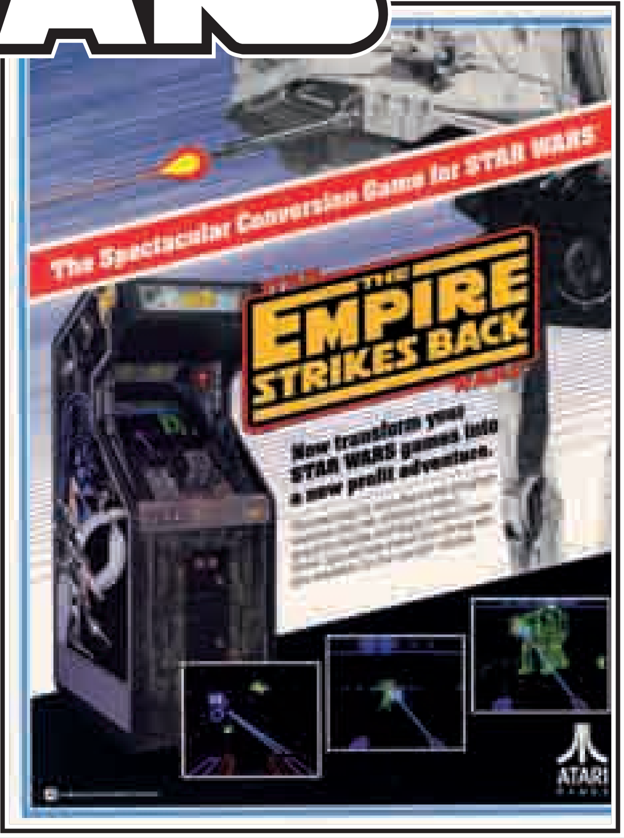
Below you'll find every single main Star Wars release (not counting re-releases or compilations). How many have you played in your lifetime?



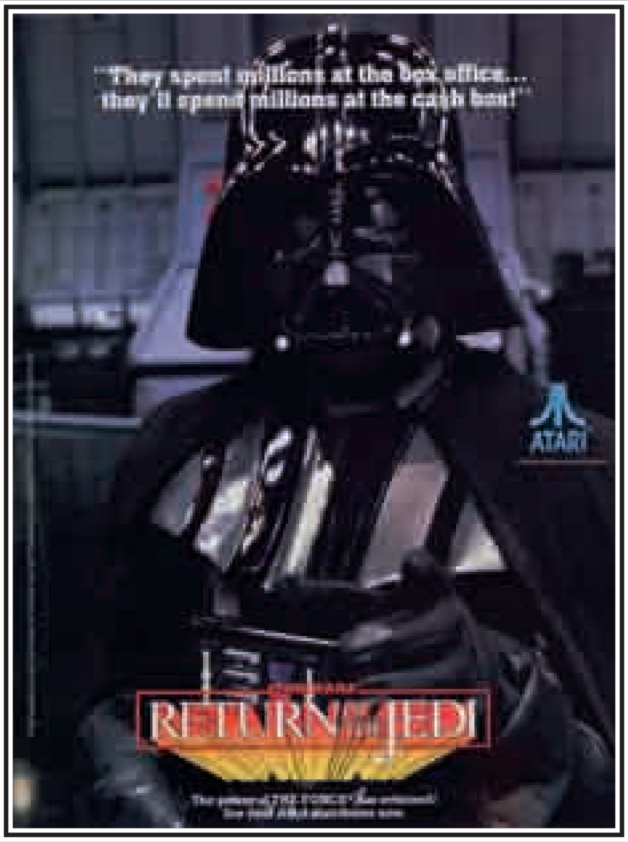
Edition, Star Wars Math: Jabba's Game Galaxy, Star War
Episode II: The New Droid Army, Star Wars: Jedi Starfighte
Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided, Star Wars (8-
console), Star Wars: TIE Fighter, Star Wars Galaxies: Episo
III Rage Of The Wookiees, Star Wars: X-Wing, Star Wa
Knights Of The Old Republic, Star Wars: Episode I Racer,
Wars: The Empire Strikes Back (8-bit consoles), Star W

Battlefront, Star Wars (Famicom), Star Wars: Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II, Star Wars: Battlefront II, Lego Star Wars: The Video Game, Star Wars: Return Of The Jedi (Arcade), Star Wars: Rebel Assault II: The Hidden Empire, Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga, Star Wars: Empire At War, Star Wars: Jedi Arena, Star Wars Chess, Star Wars: Masters Of Teras Kasi, Star Wars: Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy, Star Wars: Yoda Stories, Star Wars: Rebellion, Star Wars: Super Bombad Racing, Star Wars: Demolition, Star Wars: Force Commander, Star Wars: Bounty Hunter, Star Wars: The Clone Wars, Star Wars: Flight Of The Falcon, Star Wars Trilogy: Apprentice Of The Force, Star Wars: Republic Commando, Star Wars: Lethal Alliance, Star Wars: The Force Unleashed, Star Wars: Anakin's Speedway, Star Wars: Droid Works, Star Wars: Pit Droids, Star Wars: JarJar's Journey Adventure Book, Star Wars Episode I: Obi-Wan's Adventures, Star Wars: Early Learning Activity Center, Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace, Star Wars: Shadows Of The Empire, Super Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back, Star Wars: Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast, Star Wars: Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader

GALLERY



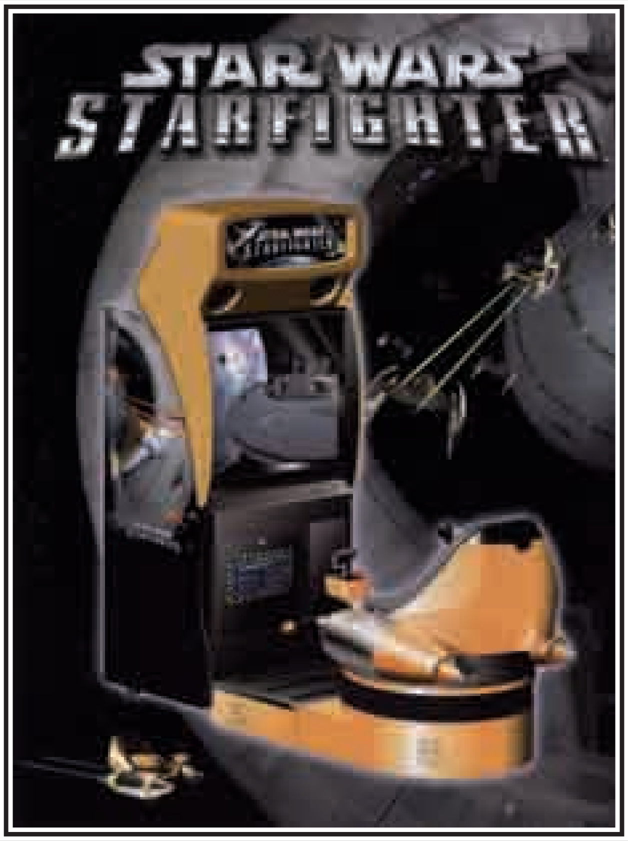
The Empire Strikes Back Year Released: 1985



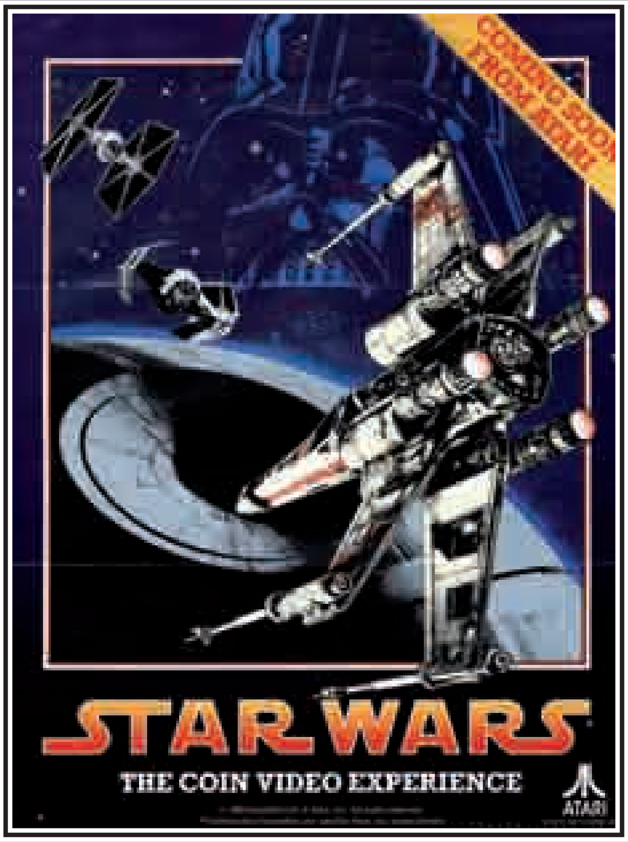
Return of the Jedi Year Released: 1984



Star Wars (home conversions) Year Released: 1987



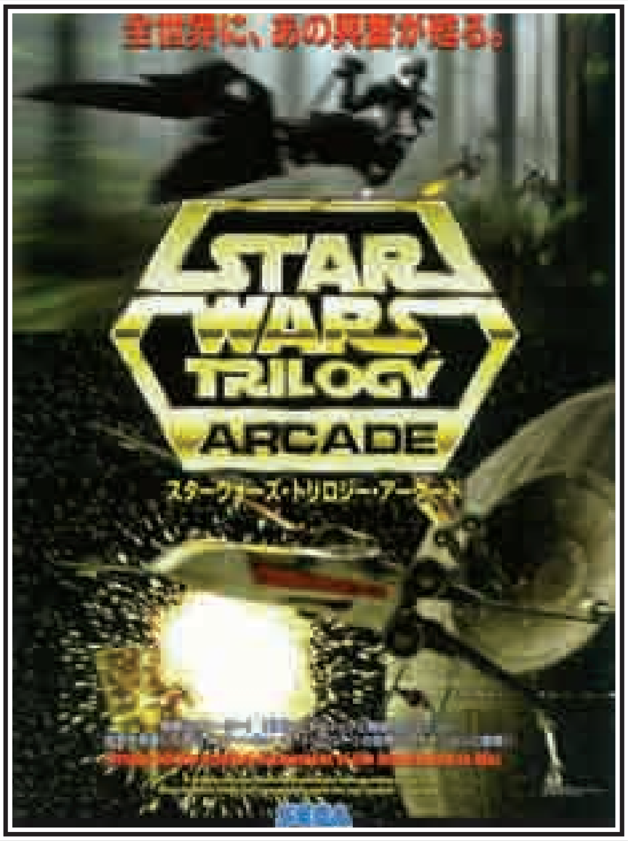
Star Wars Starfighter Year Released: 2003



Star Wars (teaser poster) Year Released: 1983



Star Wars Racer Arcade Year Released: 2000



Star Wars Trilogy Arcade Year Released: 1998



Star Wars Year Released: 1983

遠くの稀で、エキゾチックなゲームを愛する人々のため

FULL OF EASTERN

BUY SOME BEERS, GET SOME FRIENDS ROUND, THEN SMASH THEM UP IN THIS ARENA FIGHTER

RAKUGAKI SHOWTIME

Treasure's sole original PlayStation title is a game most will never have played, after a mysteriously low-profile Japan-only release. Nowadays, you'll need a fair dollop of spare change to own it. So is it worth splashing the cash on this visually inventive multiplayer battle royale? Mike Bevan investigates…

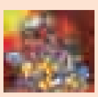
IN THE KNOW



- **PUBLISHER:** TREASURE/ENIX
- **DEVELOPER:** TREASURE
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** PLAYSTATION
- **GENRE:** ARENA FIGHTING
- **RELEASED:** 1999
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £75-£125 (USED) £150+ (NEW/SEALED)

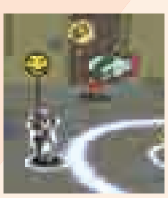
CAN'T IMPORT? WHY NOT TRY…

POWER STONE/POWER STONE 2 (DREAMCAST)
POWER STONE COLLECTION (PSP)

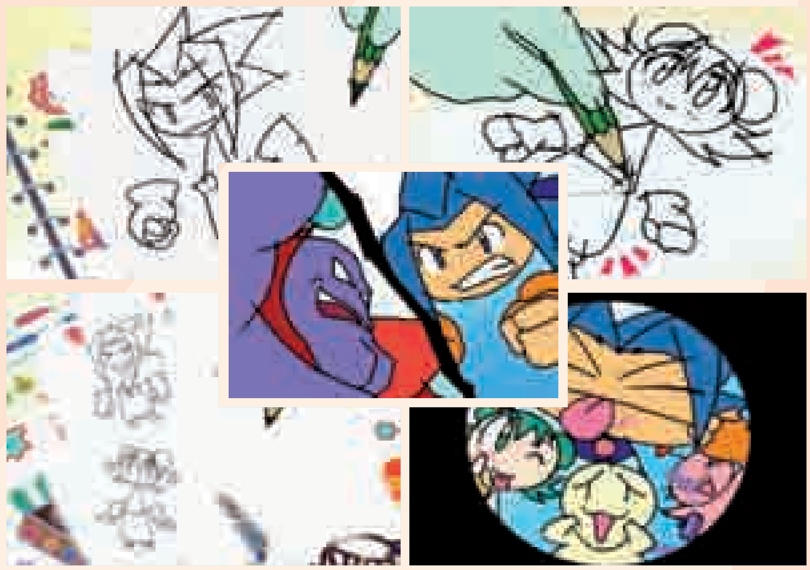


Okay – here's the thing. For the current price of a copy of *Rakugaki Showtime* you could probably pick up *Power Stone* and its sequel, *Super Smash Bros Melee* and *Super Smash Bros*, along with all the consoles to play them on. Those hankering for a smattering of multiplayer four-on-four action could do a lot worse than choose one or more of the above (take your pick which games – they all come highly recommended). As far as the 'grab-it-and-throw' ethic of Rakugaki is concerned, the closest relatives are probably the Dreamcast's two *Power Stone* titles and Konami's *Poy Poy* on PSone – games bound to spruce up even the dullest party if you can source the required number of controllers.





SCRAPPY-DAPPY-DOODLE!
Rakagaki features an array of unlikely assailants, from the lowly grunts (Zako) to the ultimate villain, 'Big Daddy'. Other characters include a Cloud clone and Marina, from Treasure's *Mischief Makers*. They can be unlocked by playing through single-player, and are then made available for multiplayer bouts. Seasoned gamers will discover that the game adjusts its level of difficulty with accomplished play.



メガ駆動機構

Ahh… the simple joys of the arena brawler. We've all done it, haven't we? Invited over friends, plied them with alcohol and snacks and then proceeded to smack their heads in through the medium of a gaming device and televisual interface. With many of us here at Retro Gamer hopelessly addicted to the magnificent Wii outing of *Super Smash Bros*, we thought it would be a splendid idea to look back at Treasure's little-known take on the genre.



» *Rakugaki Showtime* was allegedly withdrawn from Japanese stores following a mysterious legal injunction.

Rakugaki Showtime ('Rakugaki' meaning 'scribble' or 'doodle' in Japanese) was one of two titles produced in partnership with publisher Enix, the other being *Mischief Makers* on the Nintendo 64. Like most Treasure efforts, it's a take on a well-known gaming sub-genre, which throws in a number of innovative concepts to produce a unique gaming experience. *Rakugaki*'s characters inhabit a heavily stylised game world, rendered as child-like cut-out drawings created by the omnipresent, disembodied 'God Hand'. The visuals differ from the pristine appearance of *PaRappa* or *Paper Mario*, with a much rougher look to the protagonists, as if scrawled in crayon then messily cut out of bits of paper by a five year old. Don't worry though. It's a lot more endearing than it sounds.

Following Treasure's zany intro video you're offered one of four selectable characters with which to do battle. The token male and female pugilists, Yukiwo and Susami, are supplemented by a couple of diminutive Moogle-like alien critters, Pitan and Tsubohachi. A further 17 playable characters can be

GAMES FROM THE EAST WHICH NEVER MADE IT TO UK SOIL

N PROMISE



» A close-range Smiley Ball attack is pretty difficult for enemies to avoid, so come in very handy.



» Marina from *Mischief Makers* causes trouble in the midst of a bout with Susami.

unlocked – one at a time when beating the game in single-player. We should also mention that the in-game options are in Japanese, and the default difficulty is 'Kids' – check the FAQ at IGN for details of how to navigate the menus to switch this to the far more satisfying 'Normal' setting.

Rakugaki fuses the 'pick-up-and-chuck' game mechanics of *Poy Poy* and *Power Stone* with the frantic melee combat of *Smash Bros*, spawning a hilariously chaotic multi-character rumble. Bouts are played out in flat-shaded polygon arenas, which match the game's pencil-case 2D visuals well enough, and are fully rotate-able for viewing the action from any direction. The basic premise is simple – batter your opponents and wind up last man, woman or alien standing. Fallen combatants are amusingly scribbled out of existence by the God Hand, which zips around the screen pencilling in new enemies, as well as creating an endless supply of pick-up items for players to merrily hurl at each other.

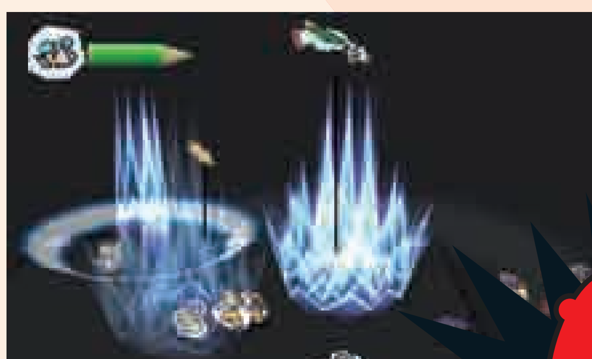
These range from large boulders to ticking bombs, homing missiles, and the slow-moving but highly destructive ICBMs – the latter resulting in apocalyptic explosions, which you really don't want to be anywhere near when they hit. Another fun item is the 'black hole' which causes temporary stasis for any unfortunate combatants caught in its wake, allowing others to chortle while continuing their airborne barrage. A strategic spin offers players different 'drives' when flinging projectiles depending on whether the directional pad is held towards or away from your target. Holding towards a foe produces a fast and hard to dodge, but less powerful, attack, while holding away from an enemy lobs your offensive trinket towards them in an arc, causing huge damage should they fail to leg it from the impact area. A clever touch is that the path of incoming projectiles is shown by a cartoon arrow giving you a notion of where they'll end up, and so where not to be standing within the next three seconds.

Most inbound projectiles can be countered and bounced back at their originator, but this is tricky, and here at **RG** we tend to rely on the much more straightforward tactic of running away. Thankfully, our cowardice coincides with the provision of handy 'jump points' dotted around the screen, which provide rapid transit via the 'Homing Dash'. Achieved by jumping, pushing the direction of the 'jump point' you wish to fly to, then pressing the jump button again, you'll find you can move quickly and fluidly around the arena, useful for collecting items and avoiding incoming aerial peril. With a bit of practice, by chaining a number of homing dash moves together it's possible to flit around the arena causing wanton destruction like a miniature scribbled superhero.

Melee attacks and close-combat specials are available, but tricky to implement, as often you'll be too busy avoiding incoming missiles to cause intimate damage to opponents. Ultimately, the most important element in *Rakugaki* is the use of the 'Smiley Ball', which appears on the playfield like an escapee from *Berzerk*, and can cause about as much panic. Picking up and catapulting the Smiley Ball continuously will 'charge' it until it starts to shimmer. At this point anyone grabbing it will trigger a 'Hallelujah!' and become super-powerful. It's like that moment in *Power Stone* after grabbing those gems, and while everyone tries to scurry out of range of the holder's wrath, they can unleash a devastating 'Super Smiley Attack'. The resulting deluge of laser blasts and/or screen-filling detonations can decimate opponents' health, after which the Smiley Ball's charge level resets and the process starts again.

Like most games of its type, *Rakugaki* is a riot in four-player mode (via multitap) – less so, if still enjoyable, for lone players, with typical playthrough times for the 12 game stages being roughly 30-40 minutes. Given the game's scarcity, and with used copies reaching silly money on eBay (at the time of writing, PlayAsia.com has one listed at $269), it would be hard to recommend at the price purely on its gaming merits, but as an eminently playable possible future investment? Possibly. Now if only Treasure would re-release it for the PSP…

» Susami's Super Smiley Attack causes these satisfying explosive plumes.



私を読み、私に書くことができ、私に知らせれば好みのゲームはある

VECTORMAN

RUN 'N' GLUM



- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **RELEASED:** 1995
- » **GENRE:** RUN-'N'-GUN
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MEGA DRIVE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID



HISTORY

It's always been the way that the best-looking games tend to make an appearance during the more disinterested years of a console's life. And for the Mega Drive that's a sentiment that's never been truer. At around the time its game-box styling changed from black graph paper to blue bubbles, a flood of visual brilliance came flowing through its development gates.

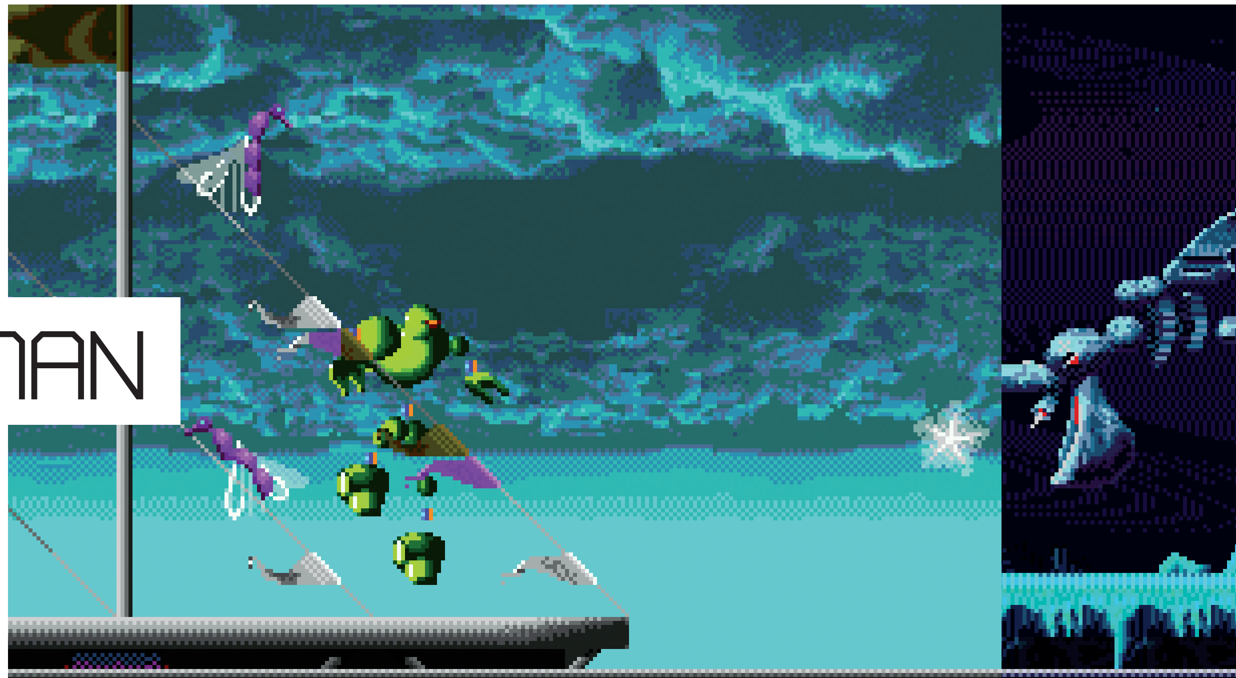
Owing to its use of 3D-rendered visuals, it's said that Sega envisioned *Vectorman* as an answer to Rare's *Donkey Kong Country*. However, Sega's hero would struggle to ape the popularity of the big ape.

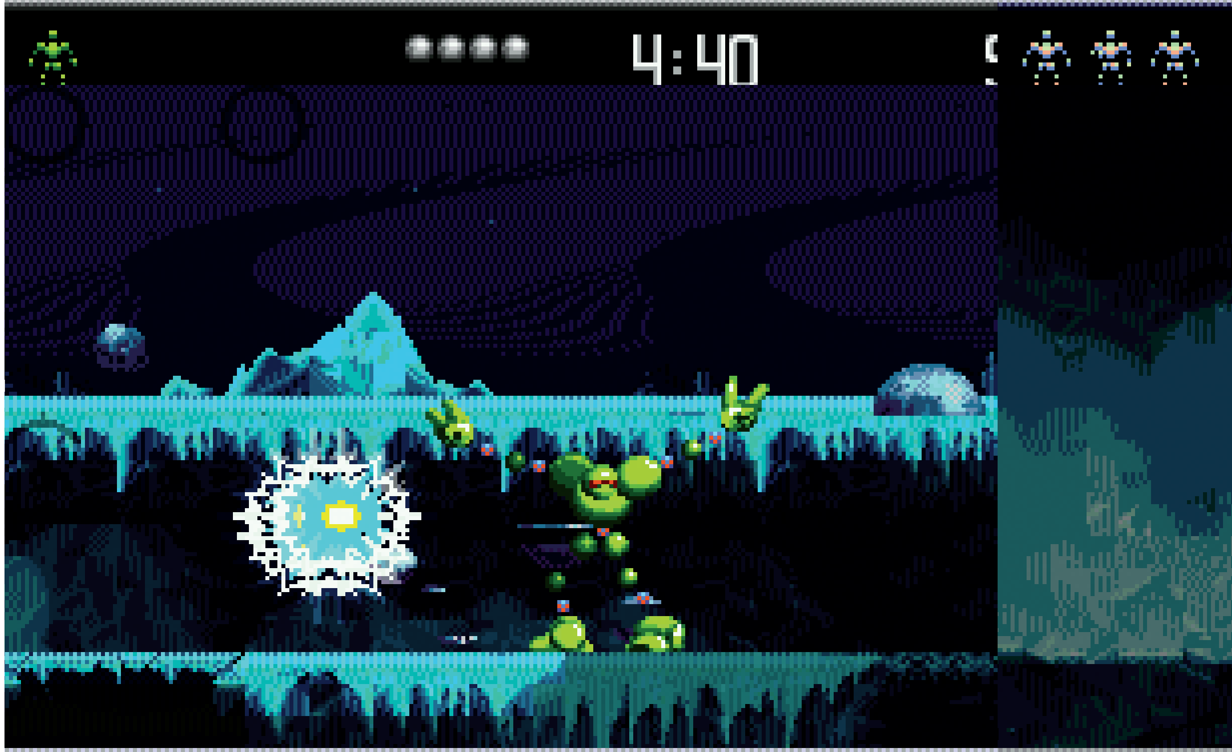
Perhaps the main rationale behind its lack of commercial endearment came from *Vectorman*'s depressant visuals. At the time games were generally colourful and inviting, *Vectorman*, however, painted itself with seaweed greens, blacks and greys, which, to a visually-fickle 12-year old, was kind of like being handed a copy of the *Guardian*.

You play an orbot: a robot slave sent to clean up Earth after humans have polluted it. We don't live on the planet; instead, we're off polluting other planets. We're waiting for the all clear from the orbots so we can return to our newly pristine home. However, one orbot, called Warhead, has managed to bond to a nuclear warhead and declare himself a dictator. It soon falls to you as Vectorman to run-'n'-gun through a series of glum-looking levels blasting orbots in a bid to topple the tyrant.

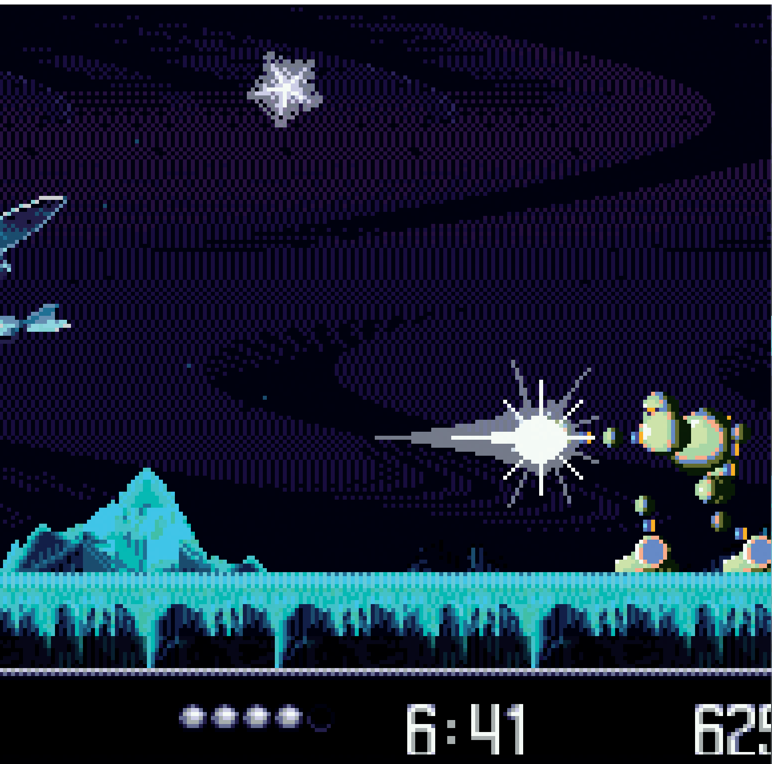
Confusingly, the company who make the orbots has blessed its creations with a hand cannon and the ability to transform into non-tidiness-related objects, like a drill to help them smash through floors or a robotic frog to allow them to swim easier, and these powers can only be unlocked by blowing up TV sets.

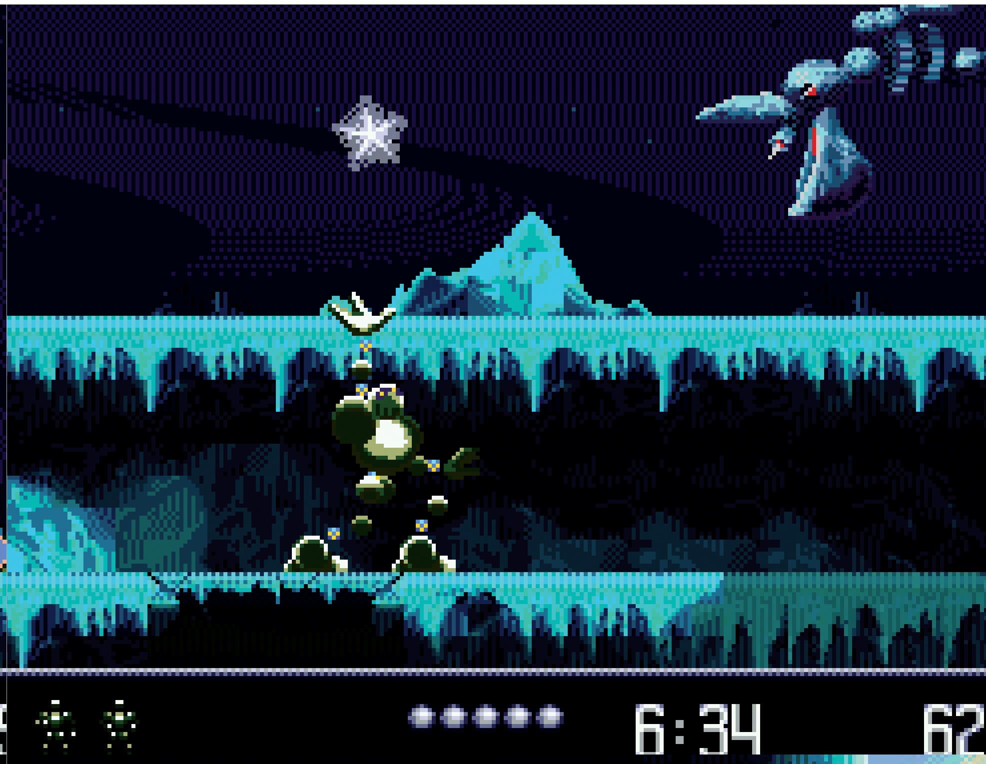
If you're becoming bored of *Gunstar Heroes* and are looking for another quality blaster for your Mega Drive, you'd be well advised to sift through the game's glumness to find this brilliant gaming gem.



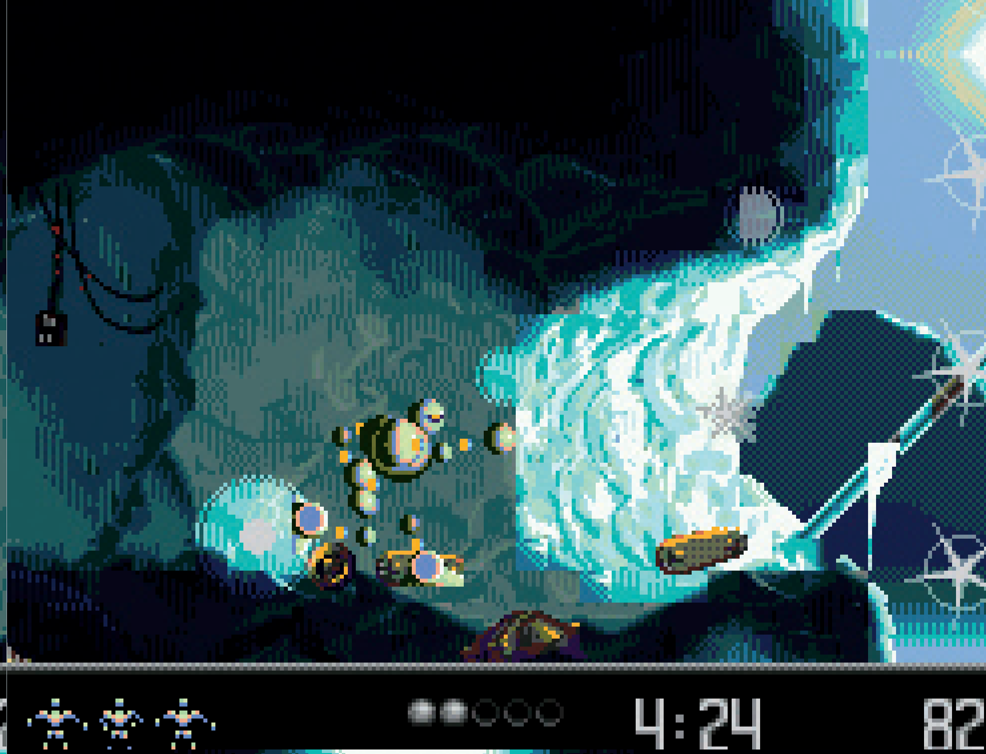





6:41


6:34


4:25


4:24




DAY 5
ARCTIC RIDGE
4:30
8178

The King of Kong

a Fistful of Quarters



IT'S ONE OF THE GREATEST DOCUMENTARIES EVER MADE, BUT JUST HOW ACCURATE ARE THE EVENTS DEPICTED WITHIN? IN A WORLD EXCLUSIVE, BILLY MITCHELL AND WALTER DAY FINALLY REVEAL ALL TO JAY SLATER



» Director , Seth Gordon takes a minute to pose for the camera.

Picture this. You are in an arcade, a mind-numbing maelstrom of shattering colours and screaming sounds. It's a vicious assault on the senses. The arcade resonates with the horrors of war, and your vision distorts as if an atom bomb had detonated in a Crayola factory. You're waggling the joystick and bashing buttons in desperation. You're playing the role of Mario (formerly Jumpman), a portly Italian plumber who is to rescue his girlfriend perched on top of a tall steel structure.

Beads of sweat drip down your forehead, your heart beats like a war drum. Your eyes are set on the world record for *Donkey Kong* and no one will stop you, including the psychotic ape who wants the fair lady for himself. The moment you climb, the primate hurls barrels towards you. Not only are tumbling barrels of concern, you have to contend with fireballs and spinning spanners. You climb further, closer towards your goal, adrenalin heightening your reactions. Jabbing a button, you narrowly miss being roasted. Flying metal misses your cranium by inches. You're seconds away from the infamous kill screen and being the world champ. Watch out for the barrel! Too late, Mario is splattered like road kill. GAME OVER.

Welcome to *Donkey Kong*, a videogaming phenomenon.

Designed by videogame godfather Shigeru Miyamoto, *Donkey Kong* was the salvation of Nintendo after the arcade game *Radar Scope* flopped Stateside. Miyamoto was asked to design a program that could replace the chips of the failed game in arcade cabinets all over North America. He slaved away on the simple, yet fiendishly difficult, game and even supplied the funky score. The end result was *Donkey Kong* – meaning 'Stupid Monkey' in Japanese – and the game became an overnight sensation all over the States. Miyamoto saved the company and was to become the Steven Spielberg of the gaming world with such classics as *The Legend Of Zelda*, *Star Fox* and *Pikmin* under his belt. As for Mario, not only was he to become Nintendo's most high-profile mascot and profitable cash cow, the game spawned a number of incarnations such as *Donkey Kong Jr* and *Donkey Kong Country* among many others. And the rest, as they say, is gaming history.

Amazingly, three decades after *Donkey Kong* hit arcades, retro gaming



» This is where it all begins – the *Donkey Kong* game title screen.



» Steve Sanders (left) and Billy Mitchell (right) back in 1982.

rivalry on this title has hit a new high. Gamers can now earn big bucks through worldwide competitions and sponsorship. It's a known fact that videogames make more money than big budget movies – indeed, only in recent years has the industry won the support of Hollywood when it came to porting hit films as games. Previously, Hollywood looked down at game developers as an irritation that dragged from their coat-tails, a hindrance that deserved little support regardless of the extra revenue that the game could generate.

"THREE DECADES AFTER DONKEY KONG HIT ARCADES, RETRO GAMING RIVALRY ON THIS TITLE HAS HIT A NEW HIGH. GAMERS CAN NOW EARN BIG BUCKS THROUGH WORLDWIDE COMPETITIONS AND SPONSORSHIP"

Hollywood has now taken notice, often with growing despair as *Grand Theft Auto IV* pilfered the pockets of *Iron Man* in times of a recession meltdown. For the first time in entertainment history, a game has damaged the profits of a summer blockbuster. However, it is the retro game and *Donkey Kong* that will be this year's cinema hit. Forget *Indiana Jones And The Kingdom Of The Crystal Skull*, Mario and the love-struck gorilla are destined to star in the summer's coolest movie: *The King Of Kong: A Fistful Of Quarters*. As films go, it's cooler than lying by a pool catching beams with Ray-Bans and a couple of Buds.

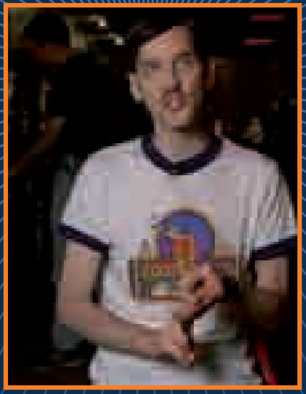
"I love the classic games, and Funspot, the arcade we feature in the movie, has been one of my favourite places in my whole life," says Seth Gordon, director of *The King Of Kong*, stating that videogames run through his veins. In production for two-and-a-half years, the documentary focuses on super sly Billy Mitchell, the reigning world champion of *Donkey Kong*, and Steve Wiebe, the underdog and unlikely hero. When Wiebe sends a tape to Twin Galaxies, the 'score verification' body, with footage that shows him beating Mitchell's untouched 25-year record, all hell breaks loose.

What follows is a furious and bitter struggle where records are beaten and friendships sour in a testament of intrigue, rivalry, greed, finger-pointing, fist-waving and double-crossing that overshadows the Nuremberg Trials for entertainment and debate. *The King Of Kong* is sheer gaming nirvana that shows the inner politics, bitchiness, backbiting and competition to devastating effect. And interestingly, it brings retro gaming and its financial influence to the masses.

"We were lucky to meet Steve Wiebe while we were finishing another documentary just days after the Twin Galaxies referees had shown up at his house to inspect his *Donkey Kong* machine. We were fascinated both by the idea that people would take competitive classic arcade gaming seriously and that it's alive and kicking," Gordon says. And indeed it is highly competitive. Big money is involved and potential champions practice their retro-gaming skills and travel all over the United States to attend conventions to try their hand at being the world's number one.

Most fail in this arcade arena as it's a brutal and closely guarded society. High scores demand the strictest of evidence to be authenticated by Twin Galaxies; the popular gaming systems such as *Donkey Kong* are often requested to be played in front of judges and the game cards/chips checked and evaluated. Who said gaming is for wimps?

"So off we went," Gordon says. "I had no idea that we'd find such a fascinating world of dedicated gamers. We chased several great stories along the way, some of which made it into the movie, such as Doris Self's attempt to reclaim her *Q*bert* record. But every



» This man is a legend at *Crystal Castles*.

» Steve Wiebe graphically explains the movement mechanics of Donkey Kong.



» Walter Day explains 'The Rules.' And no, he wasn't the spade man in *Home Alone*.



THE MAKING OF... THE KING OF KONG



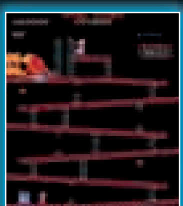
» Brian Kuh in a jovial mood.



» Billy Mitchell's *Donkey Kong* record.

SCORES ON THE DOORS

Think you've got what it takes? Then try to beat these scores…



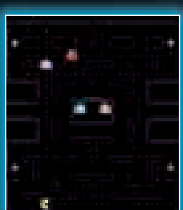
DONKEY KONG [PICTURED]
Mode: Points (hammer allowed) **Score:** 1,050,200
Record Holder: Billy Mitchell **Date Set:** 26/06/2007

CRYSTAL CASTLES [PICTURED]
Mode: Points **Score:** 910,772
Record holder: Frank Seay **Date Set:** 11/06/2004



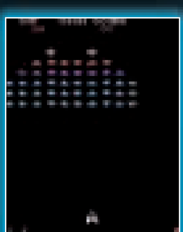
ROBOTRON
Mode: Marathon **Score:** 348, 691,680
Record Holder: Brian King **Date Set:** 29/06/1983

MISSILE COMMAND
Mode: Points (Tournament) **Score:** 1,967,830
Record Holder: Tony Temple **Date Set:** 30/03/2006



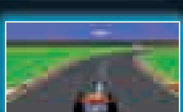
PAC-MAN [PICTURED]
Mode: Points **Score:** 3,333,360
Record Holder: Billy Mitchell **Date Set:** 03/07/1999

GALAXIAN [PICTURED]
Mode: Points **Score:** 1,114,550
Record Holder: Gary Whelan **Date Set:** 25/09/2006



POLE POSITION [PICTURED]
Mode: Points (Fuji Speedway) **Score:** 67,310
Record Holder: Les Lagier **Date Set:** 11/06/2004

SPACE INVADERS
Mode: Points **Score:** 55,160
Record Holder: Donald Hayes **Date Set:** 07/06/2003



JOUST
Mode: Points (Marathon, Single-Player)
Score: 107,216,700 **Record Holder:** James Vollandt **Date Set:** 08/07/1985

time we showed up with our cameras, the chase for the *Donkey Kong* record was obviously the most compelling story. And that's what we ended up focusing on when we finally went to edit our 400 hours of raw footage."

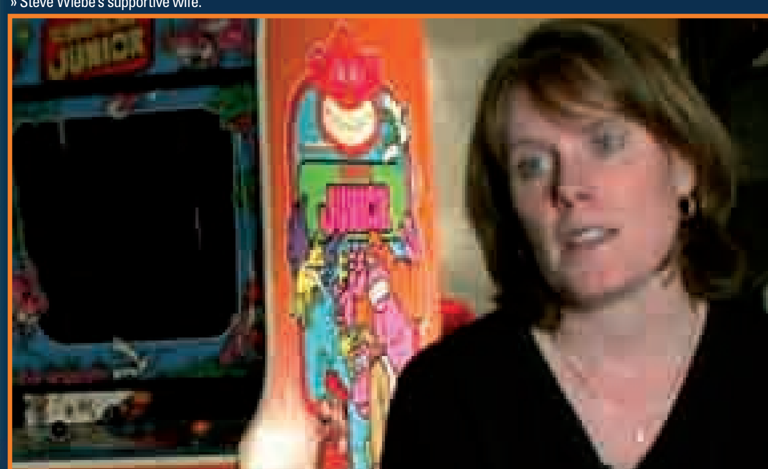
The King Of Kong has connected with an audience who had fond memories of gaming in the early Eighties and is the movie to see this year. On its release, it received high praise from America, Iceland and Australia, prompting a big budgeted remake. The movie attracts the wide demographic who have been touched by gaming in their lives – also, it's an old-fashioned 'good guy versus bad guy' flick, with Wiebe the likeable underachiever, and Mitchell as the charismatic villain who will do anything to crush the opposition.

"I don't think there is a place on Earth that wasn't touched by the arcade craze of the early Eighties, so people aged 30 to 50 have very fond memories of the time. For younger generations, it does seem like there is something in the air about harkening back to those simpler videogames from 8-bit art and music to the Wii's controller. And it's great that *Donkey Kong* is a part of that fabric," Gordon explains.

So what does it take to be the world's number one at *Donkey Kong*? Is there more to retro games than pounding buttons and waggling the joystick furiously and hoping for the best? "To be best at anything, you need to have a real passion for it, have the drive and determination to stick with it, and a natural talent for it," Steve Wiebe explains. "All of these elements have to click to be world class. Great videogames are challenging but fair, easy to understand but still mentally stimulating and demanding enough skill-wise so that not everyone can conquer them. My favourite games are, of course, *Donkey Kong*, *Donkey Kong Jr* and *Galaga*," he adds.

Preferring games from Nintendo's stable of the joystick and single-button calibre as they are easier to learn, he suggests that a great developer knows what's addictive, so that gamers want to keep coming back for more. And Wiebe certainly got bitten by the gaming bug,

» Steve Wiebe's supportive wife.





» Inspecting for suspect game boards. Potential cheating is handled very seriously by Twin Galaxies.



» Steve Wiebe relaxes on his son's drum kit.

as he yearns to be the numero uno on more than one retro title. "*Donkey Kong* and *Donkey Kong Jr* are really the ones that I wish to be the best at. I don't think I could stay married very long if I pushed it any further," Wiebe grins.

Although *The King Of Kong* is extremely enjoyable, it is cloaked in controversy. The movie's narrative follows Wiebe as he attempts to have his high score on *Donkey Kong* recognised by sending a tape of his crowning achievement to Twin Galaxies. Wiebe's progress is hampered by harassment – two officials break into his home and dismantle the machine to inspect for illegal gaming boards – and he travels 3,000 miles to play at Funspot where Twin Galaxies hold a competition. All Wiebe wants is to play against Billy and be accepted. However, the gaming authorities block his every move.

Meanwhile, Mitchell, the defending world champion, sulks and avoids Wiebe, as if he and Twin Galaxies are in cahoots. Wiebe goes on to beat Mitchell's record (only for Mitchell to reclaim it) with a grudging respect from Twin Galaxies. You will genuinely root for Wiebe – he's a humble hero who breaks down in frustration and states that his proudest moment was actually getting his teacher's certificate with no mention of *Donkey Kong*. Not since Rocky has an underdog fought the system against all odds and won. As for Mitchell, think Daniel Day-Lewis in *There Will Be Blood* and you get the picture. But are dark forces at work? Does the film weave the true story or is it fabricated to make Mitchell, the spicy sauce godfather, out as the loveable rogue and scapegoat in order to get a good angle?

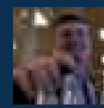
"We worked extremely hard to tell the story as we witnessed it, because, frankly, the truth was fascinating and deserved telling. As for Walter Day (president of Twin Galaxies, the leading videogame authority), he has told us that he likes the film and understands its point of view. We have discussed some points of the controversy; in some instances we have simply agreed to disagree. We feel the film speaks effectively to our perspective on the events we witnessed," says Gordon.

And Wiebe backs the film-maker, "There are two sides to every story. I know that an illegal break-in to inspect my machine did not happen. What I do know is that I came home unexpectedly to see two strangers in my garage playing *Donkey Kong*. My relationship with Twin Galaxies goes back to 2000 when I first started submitting scores. Things were quite friendly in the beginning, but the relationship definitely became strained over time as a result of the controversy."

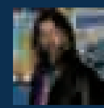
Day tells a far different story. "Gordon and Ed Cunningham (the producer) are my personal friends. Mitchell and Wiebe are my personal friends, too. I realised last year that this movie would become a hit and evolve into a cult classic that would be watched for more than 100 years," he says. "But it will also become a case study on film editing. Students will examine it to compare the storyline with the facts. It will become apparent to the students that the storyline is a brilliant episode of storytelling, but that it did not stick to the facts."

Day suggests that neither Mitchell nor Wiebe are heroes or villains, just two very nice guys playing too many videogames. "The simple reason that the film-makers altered the facts

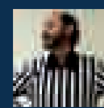
THE PLAYERS



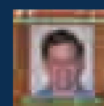
Steve Wiebe
Donkey Kong competitor who aspires to be a singer/songwriter in the future.



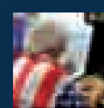
Billy Mitchell
World's most famous videogame player. He also has a great range of hot sauces.



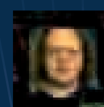
Walter Day
Future performing singer/songwriter and science-fiction novelist. The glue that helps to hold Twin Galaxies together.



Brian Kuh
Future videogame superstar and talk-show host. Still hasn't managed to get to the *Donkey Kong* kill screen though.

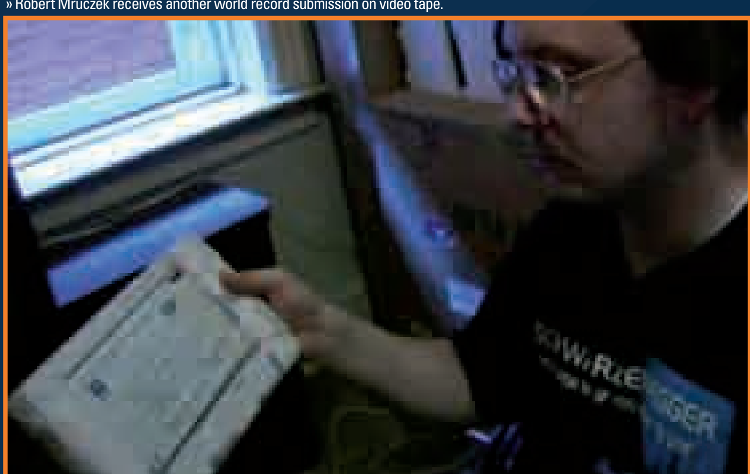


Doris Self
Doris ascended to videogame heaven on 3 October 2006. She will always be remembered as one of history's oldest videogame competitors.



Robert Mruczek
Devoted servant to the hobby, who has held past positions as Twin Galaxies' chief referee and still holds the *Star Wars* world title.

» Robert Mruczek receives another world record submission on video tape.





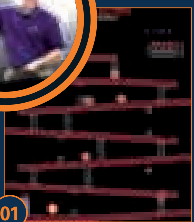
THE KING OF KONG



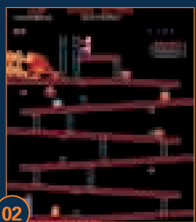
Be The King Of Kong

Well you could be if you follow these tips from Steve Wiebe…

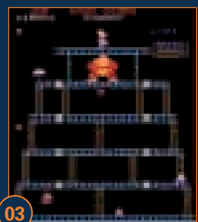




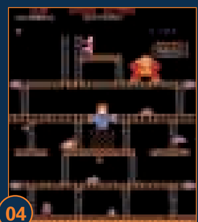
01 Learn how to control the barrels by steering them down the ladders.



02 Be very wary of dropped barrels when underneath Donkey Kong.



03 On the pie factory stay on the left until all fireballs emerge from the oil can.



04 Master the springs on the elevators and practice going up the final ladder.



05 It's important to learn and then quickly execute the rivet pattern.



» Steve Sanders as he is today.

is that it made a more intriguing story, otherwise nobody would remember the movie if it was titled '*Two Guys Fall Asleep While Playing Donkey Kong*'. There is a scene that portrays Mitchell as not coming into his restaurant (Rickey's, his popular Hollywood restaurant) to meet Wiebe. The audience believes that he is snubbing Steve and get very angry. However, what really happened is that he did come in to meet Wiebe and they interacted very cordially. However, the film-makers cut the scene and did not reveal this fact, thereby inspiring the audience to be angry at Mitchell. This omission made him look like a villain."

The plot thickens. With Gordon and Wiebe supporting their claims that the movie tells the truth and Day expressing concerns, it is only fair to get Mitchell's side of the story. A super baddie or nice guy who was deceived? "Was I made to believe one thing and it was another? Of course I was. I get deceived every day of my life – I'm a businessman. Since the movie, I get phone messages, some supportive, some threatening. I have had flowers, marriage proposals and death threats. I don't know why they chose to include the people I am closest to, why they found a way for my parents to speak negative. I just don't understand it," Mitchell says.

Mitchell is adamant that the movie was skewed in a certain direction that the film-makers wanted, sceptical of the fact that Wiebe and associate producer, Mike Thompson, come from the same area and have ties. The continuity makes no sense, the world champion claims, suggesting that *The King Of Kong* is a setup. "The cameraman who was invited into my home was there for only four hours, yet over five days, I was calling all the shots in 120 hours; that's absurd, that's crazy. He was there for four hours and I'm meant to say things on the night that he wasn't there." Mitchell also believes that the dirty work started in January 2007 when Wiebe was sent a copy of the film, yet he has yet to receive a screener. "Maybe it was in fear that I would speak out," he adds.

With regards to Wiebe's 'break-in', Mitchell believes the scene was fixed. "It makes me happy when I heard this, and my heart goes out to him in the spot that he's in, he said that the reps called ahead of time to say they were coming. The front and back of the game was locked. When Wiebe came home, he had the keys in his hands and added credits. And when they wanted to look at the board, he opened the back of the game with his key. I was invited on a radio show to be interviewed and I asked Steve to be part of it – he wouldn't have been on that show otherwise. I wanted to extend that courtesy to him and it ended up being a great show. In the show, he acknowledges he played on an illegal

"THE KING OF KONG IS A 'GOOD GUY VERSUS BAD GUY' FLICK THAT CONNECTS WITH AN AUDIENCE WHO HAVE FOND MEMORIES OF GAMING IN THE EARLY EIGHTIES"



» Steve Wiebe plays *Donkey Kong* as his son Derek sits quietly.



» Funspot – where the International Classic Game Tournament takes place.



» Walter Day and Steve Wiebe.

board. He now states that he never had a bad board. They forgot to put that in the movie. How can you backtrack?"

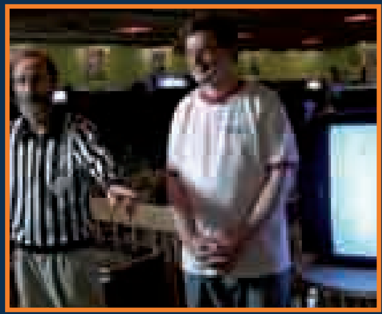
Mitchell follows that throughout the movie, he supposedly avoids Wiebe. He claims that at the Classic Gaming Expo, both gamers were united although Wiebe and the film-makers tried to distance themselves from the truth. "There was an email forwarded to me originally written by Steve Wiebe that he has the entire Classic Gaming Expo on film, because that cameraman was following us. I have my phone bill when I spoke to Steve Wiebe and he has acknowledged that we have had long, lengthy phone calls. My phone bills do not lie. Again, he acknowledged that when it came out. He acknowledged the event when the photos came out. He and I played a game. I played one game, he played many, and I scored higher than he did. And he did great: he got 893,000. I got to the end of my game and I had 929,000. That's like saying 'you got 20 million and I got 15'. What's the difference? The truth is that I didn't bring this to his attention, it's from people who were at the convention and have it on camera. There's Billy and Steve on stage. It's funny; it's hard to hide these things in today's world. Steve's a guy with a life and children like me. I don't understand his angle here, I really don't."

Not knowing Seth Gordon if he "hit him with a car", Mitchell is confident that Cunningham was the front man. Showing him the personal aspects of his life, Mitchell says that this was ignored. The charities he is involved with on a daily basis were left on the cutting-room floor as was footage of him paying folk to go to college and get a degree. Also, the movie suggests that he has a trophy wife, when she actually earns more money than he does and is educated with a bachelor, two masters, a doctorate and a PhD. "I mean, I can barely spell high school!" he laughs.

For someone who believes they've been unfairly treated, Mitchell remains dignified and wishes all involved the best of luck. He isn't bitter and hasn't allowed the film to eat away at his spirits. However, he wants his side of the story told and says that *The King Of Kong* is not what it pretends to be. "Why do they have to call those guys goons? Why do they have to criminalise those guys and say that they broke into Steve's place? They don't have to say that and I don't understand it. It's crazy. Why do they have to make Walter, who dedicates so much time to the hobby, look corrupt and incompetent? That's as far as you can get from the truth." And Mitchell is still waiting for his hard-earned $10,000 the film-makers promised to the first person to hit a million points on camera. He's not going to ask for it and doubts he'll see a cent.

So, Saint Billy or Satan, the Prince of Darkness of videogames? Watch the movie and you decide. Despite its controversy, *The King Of Kong* remains one of the most entertaining documentaries of all time and puts retro gaming well and truly back on the map. It also fuels the desire to be number one at any videogame. Armed with a pocketful of quarters, **Retro Gamer** challenges Walter Day to a game of *Astro Wars*. Flexing his fingers, he's ready to do battle.

"I will fight you to the end on *Astro Wars*," Day says, laying down the gauntlet. The two-player screen flashes and we're ready for a day's competitive play in the arcade, joystick in one hand, soda in the other. May the best man win, and please, no cheating. Cheers!



» Walter Day and Brian Kuh prepare to screen Billy Mitchell's 1,000,000 score.



THE MAN BEHIND THE SCORES

As Steve and Billy lock horns throughout *The King Of Kong* until the final confrontation, events are constantly overseen by Walter Day, folk singer and president of Twin Galaxies.

Formed in 1981, Twin Galaxies is the leading authority that establishes the rules and standardised settings on each game, with the expressed intention to organise videogame playing into a sport, with a tradition of contests, statistics, world records and star players. Day looks for a number of qualities that make a gamer the world's greatest. "Aside from lots of practice, the best players, such as Billy and Steve, come already endowed with great God-given talents. They must have superb eye-hand co-ordination so that they can make their hands perform the necessary manoeuvres," he says. "They must have good mind-body abilities so that the impulses of the brain are conveyed to their hands with as little resistance as possible. And they must have deep, intelligent thinking – the ability to grasp the nuances of the game at that deep, silent level of thought that allows them to see the bigger picture and know how to respond at each stage of the gameplay. Finally, fast reaction times. You have to outmanoeuvre the game, always be one step ahead, able to affect a countermeasure to thwart every obstacle thrown at you," he concludes.

» Billy Mitchell monitors events at Funspot from his home.





Thank you: Billy Mitchell, Steve Wiebe, Walter Day, Seth Gordon, Twin Galaxies, Revolver Entertainment.

THE CLASSIC GAME



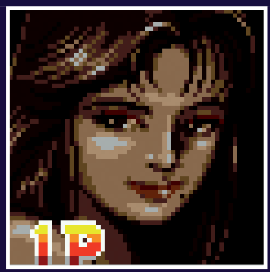
The peace is broken once more. Mr X is back and this time he's hit Axel were it hurts: in the Adam. Yes, the once peaceful, apparently crime-free city of New York is again thrown into upset after one third of a friendship is mercilessly locked in a room. Don't panic though as the remaining two thirds – accompanied by a token wrestler-type character and a rollerblading ten year old – set out to save their captured comrade and bring some order back to all the chaos.

It might sound like the most clichéd of action-film plots, but *Streets Of Rage 2* is a game that lets two people throw a punk rocker into an arcade machine of itself and eat apples off the floor. Such a blatant display of ill-hygiene and acts of ironic vandalism are just two elements what make walking the streets of rage so awesome. Still not convinced? Stuart Hunt's got six more.



Axel

Axel is the easiest character to get to grips with and to finish the game within an hour of purchase. This is basically down to his potent special attacks – particularly his Ground Upper (see Best Special boxout) – which make easy work of most to all enemies.



Blaze

Dance Teacher and ex-plod Blaze Fielding is the fastest of the four characters. As well as being agile and quick, Blaze also boasts fast weapon attacks – particularly with the knife, where she stabs and swipes with one tap of the fire button – so is one of the best all-rounders in the game.



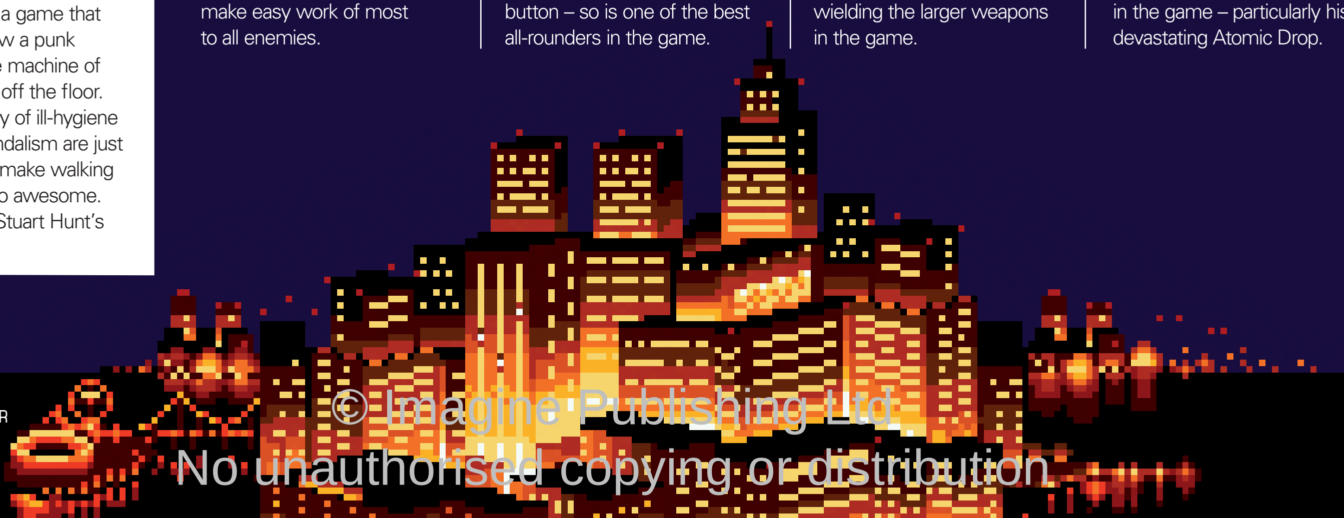
Skate

Adam's kid brother Eddie 'Skate' Hunter is the most agile of the four characters on offer, but he's also the weakest. He's the only character in the game that can perform a dash, but he seriously struggles when wielding the larger weapons in the game.



Max

Max's biggest downfall is that he's too slow. Ninjas, kickboxers, bikers and anything that owns an animation will cause him all kind of problems. This is counteracted somewhat by Sega blessing him with the strongest moves in the game – particularly his devastating Atomic Drop.



MEMORABLE MOMENTS

WHY IS IT A CLASSIC?



Where's part 4 Sega?

There are many reasons – the thumping score by Yuzo Koshiro and the awesome visuals, the pace of the game, the cool-looking bosses and brilliantly themed stages – why *Streets Of Rage* can be seen as a classic. The SNES bagged itself a home port of *Final Fight*, but it was a load of lazy crap. Despite not looking as refined as its Capcom rival, *Streets Of Rage* let two players work together to smash up a load of gangly goons. It's also shockingly violent (for its day), with stabbings, women in leather and fishnets attacking you with electric-charged bullwhips and some brutal moves that included administering several quick knees to the face.

BEST CHARACTER



Not Max

Looking like he hailed from a circus of strong men and with a pointlessly slow and laborious quick attack, we're all in agreement that Max is by far the worst character. The mantle for the best character though is a close toss up between Axel – for his balance, but losing points (not of his own doing) for looking like every other videogame character to ever throw a punch – and Skate for his speed and being able to beat up people seven times his Body Mass Index, but losing style kudos for dressing like Pac-Man. These pros and cons are just too equal to try to split hairs over, so we're going to bottle out and give the award to Blaze Fielding instead.

BEST BOSS



Grand Uppercut: Forward, Forward, B

Axel's Grand Uppercut is good for three reasons: first, it looks pretty darn impressive; second, it doesn't sap any of your energy if it connects with something; and third, it makes your Mega Drive say 'Grand Upper' (or 'Bare Knuckle' in the Japanese version) in a demonic tongue. The Grand Upper is easy to pull off and stupidly effective against enemies charging towards you. The actual move involves watching Axel scrape his knuckles along the pavement to create a concentrated charge of friction, with which he can then use to melt the face off of any person with the name Signal.

BEST MOVE



Shiva

Shiva is Mr X's mysterious underling and martial-arts muscle. Because he seems to have this pungent air of sensible about him (owing to the fact that he looks relatively normal in comparison to everyone else you've had to fight up until that point), you can tell right away that he's going to put up a bit of a fight. Strutting around calmly, draped entirely in black, Shiva's entire move arsenal consists of potent windmills and posing. Also, he can pretty much break all of your attack combos and he consistently threatens to make your life a complete misery with his annoyingly fatal 'Final Crash' move.

BEST STAGE



Stage 2: Construction Bridge

Starting on a street, then moving into a bar, to a baseball stadium and then to a theme park, on to a jungle section, a factory and a well-guarded HQ – to say *Streets Of Rage 2* is a boisterous beast is no understatement. But it's the bridge section that is the best stage. Crossing said bridge though is tough – it's full of guys on scrambler bikes trying to smite you with pipes – but by heck it's a lot of fun. And when you cross the bridge you end the stage in a construction site where you fight a guy with a jetpack called Jet. You're then forced to fight him using pretty much just flying kicks. Yes, it makes the fight look cheap, but it's the best way.

STANDOUT MOMENT



Co-op – two pads are better than none

To say that the true brilliance of *Streets Of Rage 2* becomes apparent exactly two minutes into plugging the stringy end of a second control pad into your Mega Drive and plonking what looks like a plastic kidney into the hands of a friend is no lie. *Streets Of Rage 2* contains one of the most comprehensive move lists of any side-scrolling beat-'em-up, leaving plenty of room for you and a pal to experiment with the action. Fighting for health-apples, flipping over adversaries like a pair of gymnasts and launching a Big Ben into a group of Talks, was truly one of the best multiplayer times to be had on the Mega Drive.



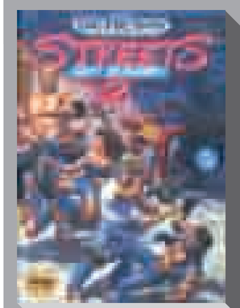
What the mags said… ages ago

Mean Machines
"Let's make no bones about it, *Streets Of Rage 2* is the greatest sequel we've seen for ages and is certainly the best-scrolling beat-'em-up ever to hit a home console."

Mega
"The best beat-'em-up on the Mega Drive. Just make sure you use the *hard* setting with no continues – it's for your own good"

What we think

Yup, certainly does. *Streets Of Rage 2*, along with *Sonic 2*, are the greatest Sega sequels ever made. And yes *Mean Machines*, it still can be considered the best-scrolling beat-'em-up to hit a home console – name one better, it's impossible.



IN THE KNOW

- **DEVELOPER:** SEGA
- **PUBLISHER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10-£15
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** GAME GEAR, SMS

THE MAKING OF...

The Eye Of The Beholder Trilogy

With its maths-based rules and, at times, tedious number-crunching combat mechanics, the Dungeons & Dragons franchise transferred perfectly to the world of computer gaming. Craig Ritchie looks at a collaboration between SSI and Westwood that turned into one of the most successful licences of the early Nineties. You gain 2,800 experience points and advance a level











» Like any *AD&D* product, *Eye Of The Beholder* allowed for full customisation of characters. Which meant 18 for all stats, really.



» The game was still fully playable in 16 colours if all you had was an EGA monitor.

While the contemporary videogame market sees only slightly incremental changes in technology – maybe a slightly faster graphics chip or a Blu-Ray rather than a DVD drive – the early Nineties were a time of radical change. The leap from 16 to 256 colour graphics easily stands as one of the most momentous advances in gaming hardware, perhaps overshadowed only by the 3D revolution later that same decade. Add to this the growing penetration of digital audio hardware and the steadily increasing popularity of home personal computing, and you have a scene just waiting for a talented group of developers to unleash gaming magnificence onto a hungry gaming market. And this is exactly what happened when Westwood released its superb *Eye Of The Beholder* in 1991.

A few years earlier, strategy and tactical computer wargame stalwarts SSI had secured the licence to produce all of TSR's *Dungeons & Dragons* computer game titles. Long time SSI executive Chuck Kroegel, who had established a good working relationship with Westwood Associates (before it changed its name to Westwood Studios), negotiated a deal for it to develop a novel *D&D* experience that would make full use of the new hardware as well as take advantage of the popularity that FTL's successful first-person RPG *Dungeon Master* was enjoying at the time. "The decision to go with Westwood basically came from the fact that they had done several games with us in the past," recalls SSI founder Joel Billings. "Westwood started out doing conversions. They took *Roadwar 2000* and converted it to another computer, I think from Apple to Commodore or Atari. Chuck Kroegel got in with them – he was like Westwood's editor. He was the guy the Westwood people knew because I was pretty much only focused on making wargames at the time. The way you'd work it, somebody would be the guy who got to know the developer and as we got bigger and there was more management stuff, I didn't do that so much any more. It was actually Chuck who realised that our developers were our bread and butter."

"I was the relationship guy dealing with Brett Sperry at Westwood," reiterates Kroegel, current CEO of Petroglyph Games who was in charge of many of SSI's hit products back in the day. "We worked with each other throughout the *Eye Of The Beholder* series. We also drew in Jim Ward at TSR, and the three of us worked closely on the games, much more so than developers and publishers do nowadays. There was a lot of involvement there. We decided to let Westwood run with it by letting Brett Sperry's vision of the game work itself out. Clearly, it was inspired by *Dungeon Master,* which was a big game on the Atari ST. I guess to some degree *EOB* became *Dungeon Master* on the PC. When it came to *Dungeons & Dragons,* the two most successful series we produced were the *Gold Box* done internally and then the *Eye Of The Beholder* series done by Westwood Studios. I was involved from the beginning on both of those series. Our presentation to TSR was the precursor to the *Gold Box* series that won their hearts and made them

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** SSI
- » **DEVELOPER:** WESTWOOD STUDIOS
- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **PLATFORMS:** AMIGA, PC, SNES, MEGA CD, GBA
- » **GENRE:** RPG
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+

» The **Retro Gamer** team find themselves back where it all began.



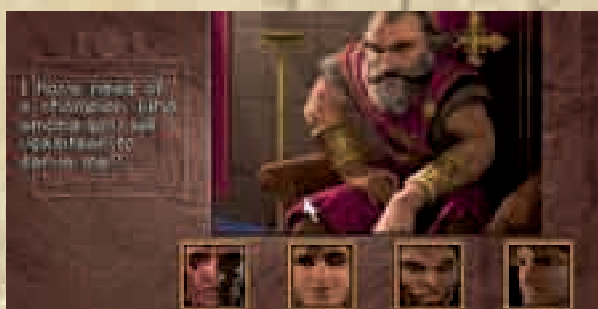
» What do adventurers DO in all that time? Play *Dungeons & Dragons* maybe?



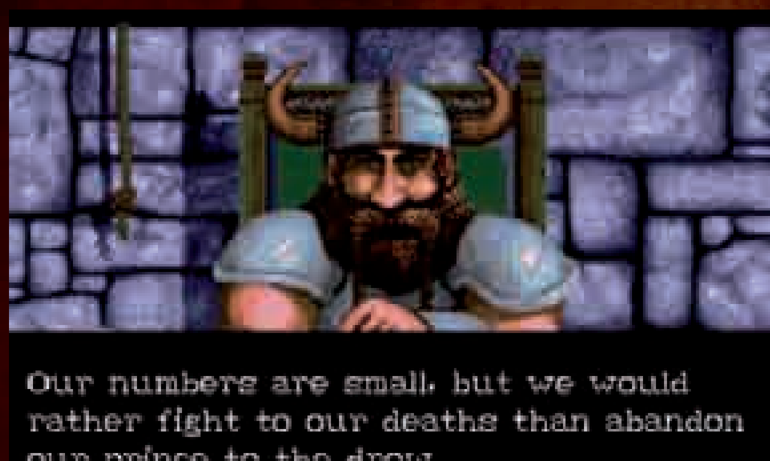
LANDS OF LORE OF THE BEHOLDER

Released in 1993 and hailed as 'the game that *Eye Of The Beholder III* should have been', Westwood's *Lands Of Lore: The Throne Of Chaos* is an absolutely brilliant RPG title. "SSI contracted out to do *EOB III* probably because Westwood didn't have the staff available to do it," explains Joe Bostic. "We were working on the *Lands Of Lore* franchise which was likely deemed a more productive use of our resources. *Lands Of Lore* was built, to some degree, off of *EOB* technology but had nothing to do with *EOB III* and *Lands Of Lore* was never intended to be *EOB III*. I think Westwood wanted to create a new franchise that was not burdened with *D&D* rules and licence fees."

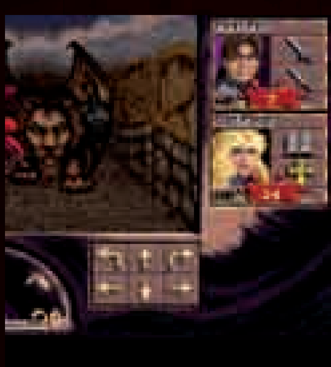
In the opinion of **Retro Gamer** at least, fans of the *Eye Of The Beholder* series should definitely pick up *Lands Of Lore: The Throne Of Chaos*, an excellent and very welcome member of the old-school first-person RPG genre. Incidentally, the game also spawned two sequels, which, in an interesting twist of fate, saw the second game adored and the third title ignored. Hmmm, sounds like another old-school first-person RPG series we've heard of…







» The Sega-CD version had a number of enhancements, including much longer cut-scenes complete with naff voice acting.



decide to go with us rather than Electronic Arts. By the way, we wowed them with a graphic demo developed for us by Westwood Studios." With the most sought after licence in role-playing games in its hands, plus a deal with a publisher they had long-standing professional ties with, the trio of Westwood, SSI and TSR got to work on the first game of what would come to be called the *Legends Series*.

Development of *Eye Of The Beholder* took around 18 months, a short period by today's standards, but definitely a solid development cycle for the era. A fair portion of Westwood's resources were devoted to the project. "I'm guessing 30 per cent or so," says Joe Bostic, one of *EOB*'s designers and now studio creative director and co-founder of Petroglyph, "but at times 60 per cent of the studio would be working on it. Project staffing tended to vary according to specific project needs and other projects that were being worked on at the time."

SSI veteran game developer George MacDonald headed up the creative side of the proceedings, ensuring that Westwood fully used the expansive base material provided by TSR to craft a plot that fit in perfectly with the existing *Forgotten Realms* canon. *Eye Of The Beholder* would hint at the politics of Waterdeep, incorporate the Drow mythos and of course bring in the ever-popular concept of a Dwarven colony living deep underground. As could be expected when dealing with a successful franchise with both a huge fan base and an expansive game universe, it was essential that Westwood's work was authorised each step of the way. *Eye Of The Beholder*'s real-time combat was perhaps the most radical change Westwood made to *Dungeons & Dragons*, given the turn-based nature that the official rules are designed for. "SSI was our primary contact," says Bostic, "but TSR also had veto power over some of our design ideas. Ultimately, it was SSI as they approved the development milestones. However, it was very much Westwood's game. There was very little creative direction from SSI or TSR. There were challenges to get the *D&D* combat system to work in real-time, though. We were inspired by *Dungeon Master*, which was real-time, and the gaming world was moving in that direction, which led to strategy games becoming real-time with *Dune II*. Fortunately, TSR gave in on some of the changes we had to do to support the real-time gameplay."

Another significant design change from earlier computer *Dungeons & Dragons* titles was that *Eye Of The Beholder* only allowed the player to create a party of four at the start of the game, two shy of the six-party norm that SSI's *Gold Box* games had popularised. While in no way going against any core *Dungeons & Dragons* formula, this still irked some gamers as it meant either giving up one of their preferred classes or races, or perhaps compromising by dual-classing one character. This, however, had the result of slower level advancement because experience points gained were divided between that character's various classes, as per TSR's existing rules. The result was that most parties resembled a pretty standard layout, with a mage and a cleric in the back and a fighter, paladin or ranger combo up front. The overall design of *EOB* had also rendered the thief class wholly unnecessary, with the whole



» The troublesome beholder in question, Xanathar. Not a nice chap at all.



» What good is a dungeon without any dragons?

game able to be completed without once having to rely on lock picking, stealing or any other of the thief's skills.

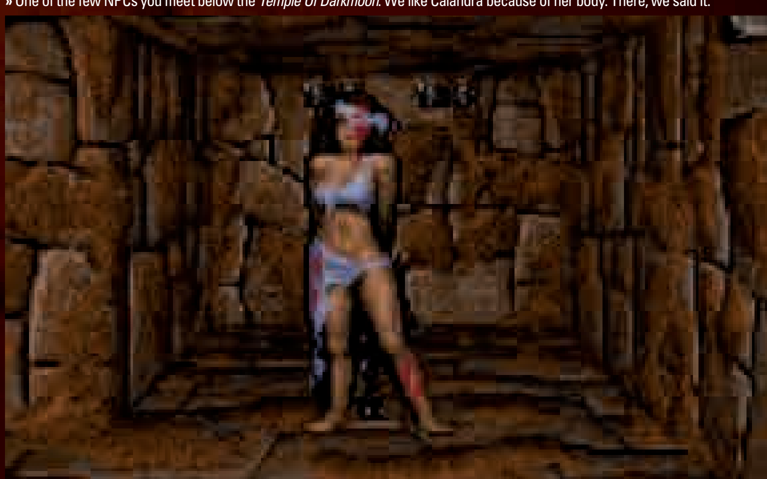
And, of course, what would an RPG be without NPCs to add to the party? This was an exciting part of the overall experience, given that they were so few and far between and that you suddenly found yourself with a whole extra backpack for storage – something that could become an issue after traversing through just a few levels. Plus, because your party could only have a maximum of six characters at one time, this meant careful selection of which NPCs you would keep with you and which would get the boot.

Beyond just re-creating *D&D* gameplay in a novel way, another drawcard for *Eye Of The Beholder* came from the fact that it was a wholly beautiful and immersive experience, and really took gamers to the sewers beneath Waterdeep with better sound and visuals than had ever been seen in any *Dungeons & Dragons* game to date. Westwood made full use of the then new 256-colour VGA graphics cards, its artists carefully crafting enemies and environments alike. Spell effects, traps and enemy attacks were well animated and the level of graphical detail was so high that some of the puzzles were able to rely on the player spotting tiny buttons hidden on wall surfaces. The walls, floors and ceilings of each section of the game also had suitable colours and unique patterning, with new environments being revealed the further the player descended. Starting with the brick and mud of the early levels to the cleanly carved stone architecture of the Dwarven city, or the green habitat of the Thri-Kreen, designs would stay the same for a handful of levels, with the result that every time the scenery changed, players would feel a genuine sense of progress and the thrill of a new discovery.

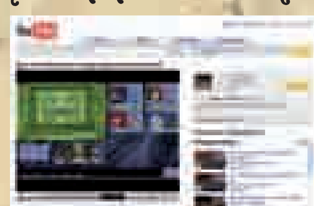
Overall, this was an awesome *D&D* experience in every sense, complete with the process of traditional quad-paper mapping being utterly indispensable. The level designs were very complex, with quests sometimes requiring that the party return to a level that the player thought was complete. Former multiformat gaming magazine *Zero* actually ran incomplete maps submitted by a reader who thought he had seen all that the Dwarven levels had to offer, but as it turns out they need to be revisited much later in the game and the actual level was about a third larger than the one that was published in the mag.

One thing that was missing from the original PC release, however, was a proper ending sequence. Instead, after defeating the titular beholder Xanathar, the game simply presented you with two pages of text and dumped you back to the DOS prompt. This may sound like a small niggle, but after completing such a mammoth quest, and after overcoming the abundance of tough puzzles and dealing with the numerous deaths of your party members, some kind of animation sequence would have been great. This was rectified in the

» One of the few NPCs you meet below the *Temple Of Darkmoon*. We like Calandra because of her body. There, we said it.



SPEED OF THE BEHOLDER



The speed-run craze has been around for a while, with gamers competing with one another for the fastest time to complete either specific in-game tasks or entire games themselves. Westwood's classic *Eye Of The Beholder* is no exception, with some amazing runs available for viewing on YouTube. Have a search for a user called saberkitty119, and view his improved single segment playthrough of the first title. This gamer is so familiar with a title that took most players literally months to get through that he can complete the entire thing in under 12 minutes. Wow. Granted, he took advantage of some design loopholes and skipped out large areas of most levels, but nevertheless it is still a very impressive watch.

THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER TRILOGY



» Thanks, Khelben, don't mind if I do.



» This particular pile of loot was ultimately useless, because once you had entered this room in *EOB II* you could never leave again.

later conversions of the title, but was still a strange omission on Westwood's part.

Regardless of this minor point, *Eye Of The Beholder* met with rave reviews across the board, extremely popular both in Europe and America, and gaming stores quickly found themselves without stock to meet the demand. "Along with *Panzer General*, *Eye Of The Beholder* was our other phenomenon, selling over 131,000 copies," recalls Joel Billings. "In February 1991 we put out 20,000 copies, which was a huge number in the channel, and they all disappeared. We put them out and 'boom!' they were gone. It only happened like that with *Eye Of The Beholder* and *Panzer General* – they just blew off the shelves."

The success of the game plus the burgeoning console industry saw *EOB* ported to the 16-bit consoles of the day. "We did the Sega-CD version in-house," says Joe Bostic, "while the SNES version was outsourced. The issues with porting the game to console were memory limitations and performance, but more important was trying to work out a controller-based UI. The results were functional, but the industry has advanced so much more since those days." While it was workable using a joypad, the interface of the console ports changed little from the PC version, which was ultimately designed with mouse control in mind. Still, dedicated gamers adapted to the slightly clunky controls, and the sewers of Waterdeep opened up to a whole new segment of the gaming market.

As could be expected of any massive hit, SSI and Westwood got to work on a sequel right away. *Eye Of The Beholder II: The Legend Of Darkmoon* was built on an engine which was basically identical to that of the first game. Able to reuse a lot of the same code, Westwood's development time was much shorter and the primary focus was shifted on to gameplay, level design and plot. There were minor graphical tweaks here and there, but Westwood had by then established a trademark artistic style which was carried over to *Legend Of Darkmoon*. One notable new feature was the inclusion of an outdoor location at the start of the game, one thing that the *Wizardry*, *Might And Magic* and *Ultima* games all had that the original *EOB* did not. Sure, you simply fought a couple of wolves and only met up with one old woman, but it did provide the player with some (albeit limited) experience of actually travelling to the Temple, rather than simply finding themselves inside at the start of the game.

As mentioned earlier, the team at Westwood were very much influenced by *Dungeon Master*, and it was widely agreed that the first *EOB*'s level design and overall gameplay were a step up from its spiritual predecessor. Following suit, Westwood upped its game yet again, with *Legend Of Darkmoon* offering even

CONVERSION OF THE BEHOLDER



In taking full advantage of the newfangled wonder that was the CD, the Sega-CD version of *Eye Of The Beholder* sported an excellent soundtrack from respected Japanese game composer Yuzo Koshiro, known for his work on such classic soundtracks as *Ys I & II*, *ActRaiser* and *Streets Of Rage*. Another addition was the lengthier animated cut-scenes and spoken dialogue, and even though the voice acting was a little laughable, the package as a whole was very well received.

Similar to the original PC version, the SNES title also allowed for only one save spot, which meant careful thought as to whether to overwrite the existing game. Save in a bad area, say, just before a fight you're too low level for, in a location where you could not safely rest, and you may have found that you needed to start the entire game from scratch. While computer versions allowed for manual backups, the console version was unforgiving in this regard, which meant that careful progress and careful saving was essential.

Finally, there was also a Game Boy Advance title released in 2003, which saw an attempt to merge *EOB*'s interface with *Gold Box*-style isometric turn-based combat. The result was a somewhat tedious dungeon crawl that was neither as good as the original *Eye Of The Beholder*, nor the older SSI products its combat was imitating. Leave this one well alone.





more difficult puzzles and trickier situations, some of which may have been just a bit too challenging for many gamers. "We built new features upon the existing engine," says Bostic, "and we made harder puzzles for sure. At the time, we thought the puzzles in *EOB* were about the same level of difficulty as *Dungeon Master*. The puzzles in *Eye Of The Beholder II*, though, were much more difficult. The idea was that *EOB II* should challenge those who had mastered the difficulty level of the original *Eye Of The Beholder*."

Another sneaky inclusion was Insal the thief. Whereas NPCs in the first game were always a welcome addition, either as ranged fighters or spell casters, this little bastard – who you'd freed from the Temple's prison – would run off with a choice selection of your loot while the party was resting. This was a fine novelty by the designers and serves as another example of the effort that Westwood made to add depth to both the plot and characters, the general lack of which was perhaps one of the only other common criticisms of the first title.

Overall, 1992 was a brilliant year for Westwood, having developed both *EOB II: Legend Of Darkmoon* and the ground-breaking real-time-strategy hit *Dune II*. It was no surprise, then, that *EOB II* was another outstanding success for SSI and Westwood, with many gamers torn between whether the original or the sequel is their favourite. Magazines praised it, consumers snatched it up yet again, and SSI decided that a third and final instalment was necessary to round off the *Legends Series* into a trilogy.

By now, however, first-person role-playing had seen further advances with the release of Origin's *Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss* in 1992. Detailed auto-mapping, advanced graphics and most of all smooth 3D movement in a beautifully realised environment upped the bar for the competition. With its flagship series *Might And Magic*, New World Computing – although it would stick to its 2D turn-based structure of old – worked hard at crafting beautiful indoor and outdoor environments of its own. It added enough new features, side quests and NPCs that it managed to stay in contention with the excellent *Xeen* series, which along with Sir Tech's final *Wizardry* games were among the last great outings in a genre that was slowly dying. *Eye Of The Beholder III*, on the other hand, showed very little in the way of improvements or additions, and ultimately hadn't taken the series anywhere new. As a result, it was widely agreed that *Eye Of The Beholder III* did not possess the same flavour or appeal as the previous two.

While Westwood had designed and produced *EOB* and *EOB II*, SSI did the last outing internally with its own group of



» You're not really going to say no, are you? After all, that's where all the action is…

developers. So, was this shift from Westwood's team to the developers at SSI the crucial change that resulted in the final game being considered a disappointment, or were there other factors at play? "It was the third in the series, so we just sort of did the thing and didn't change much," explains Kroegel. "I think it's as much that as anything else: sequels can suffer in that way, so I think that's what happened. I think that the quality was still there and it was still the same series, and that even if Westwood had done it, *Eye Of The Beholder III* would still have had the same problems. They were interested in doing their own series, *Lands Of Lore*, which I recall was really an extension of the *EOB* engine. They wanted to do that and said they can only do so much in their studio. They helped us use the technology they had built and got royalties off it. So, Westwood was involved, but to a lesser degree given their interests in *Lands Of Lore*." Therefore, with Westwood's resources focused on its new project and SSI's team sticking to the now almost three-year-old technology – a considerable length of time given the many changes the games industry saw during this period – it was only hardcore *EOB* fans that took to the final game with enthusiasm.

Despite a lacklustre conclusion to the series, the *EOB* trilogy remains an important, much loved and well remembered part of gaming history. Thanks to the technology of the time, the hard work of SSI, and the talents of Westwood, the *Eye Of The Beholder* games truly live up to the title of their series: Legends.

» These stone portals played a big part in the *Eye Of The Beholder* series.



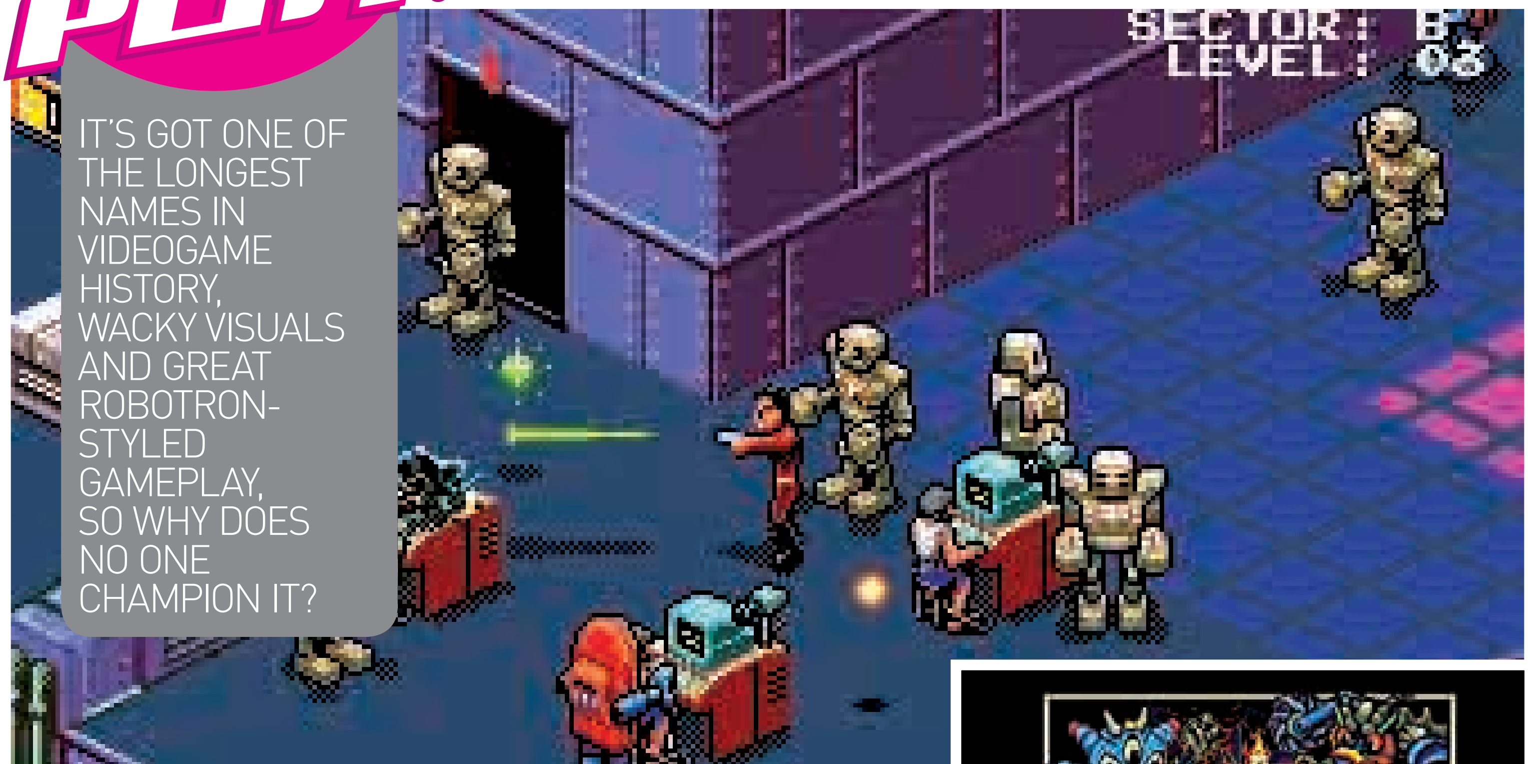
» Kelten and Bertram were having a bad day.



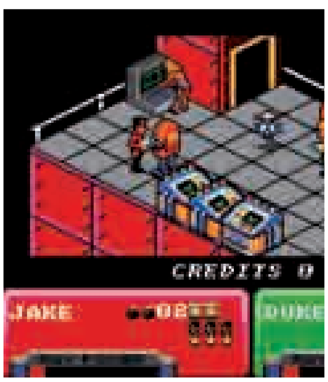
WHY YOU MUST PLAY...

ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS

IT'S GOT ONE OF THE LONGEST NAMES IN VIDEOGAME HISTORY, WACKY VISUALS AND GREAT ROBOTRON-STYLED GAMEPLAY, SO WHY DOES NO ONE CHAMPION IT?



» *Escape*'s arcade version has some brilliantly cartoony-style graphics.



» Fans of the Sam Coupe will be pleased to know that it also features a great conversion of *Escape*.

Run-'n'-gun games have always been a staple favourite in the Retro Gamer offices and not just because Darran constantly beats Stuart at them. Often requiring insanely quick reflexes and great hand-eye coordination, they're extremely satisfying to play, and when pulled off correctly – *Robotron: 2084, Gunstar Heroes, Metal Slug* – offer an injection of adrenalin that few other genres can match.

Criminally left out of our recent top 25 that appeared in **RG** 44, this is our chance to redeem one of the greatest and funniest shooters that you're ever likely to play: Tengen's utterly bonkers *Escape From The Planet Of The Robot Monsters*.

Essentially a homage to the corny B-movies of old, Atari Games' *Escape* (as we'll call it because we're too lazy to type its full title) is an insane romp, that, while not without its issues, will ensure that you're always playing it with a huge smile splayed across your face.

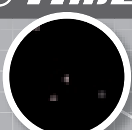


» Paying homage to old B-movies gives *Escape* and its story a real sense of fun.

Indeed, it's the nutty humour that really adds to the overall Escape experience, and you'll be laughing with delight as Jake and Duke go about their hilarious animation routines. Walking into walls, hanging in empty air before falling off a ledge, or getting sucked up by the level-shifting 'Port-O-Matic' is all in a day's work for the intrepid rescuers, and it helps give the coin-op a unique charm and style that few other games of the era were able to match.

For all its humour, however, *Escape* is a surprisingly tough blaster – more so on the middling home conversions that appeared – and

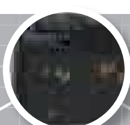
TIMELINE



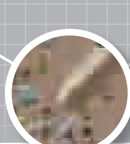
BOSCONIAN
Version Featured: Arcade
Year Released: 1981



ROBOTRON: 2084
Version Featured: Arcade
Year Released: 1982



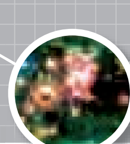
SMASH TV
Version Featured: Arcade
Year Released: 1990



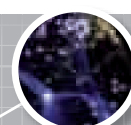
ZONE 66
Version Featured: DOS
Year Released: 1993



SUPER STARDUST
Version Featured: Amiga
Year Released: 1994

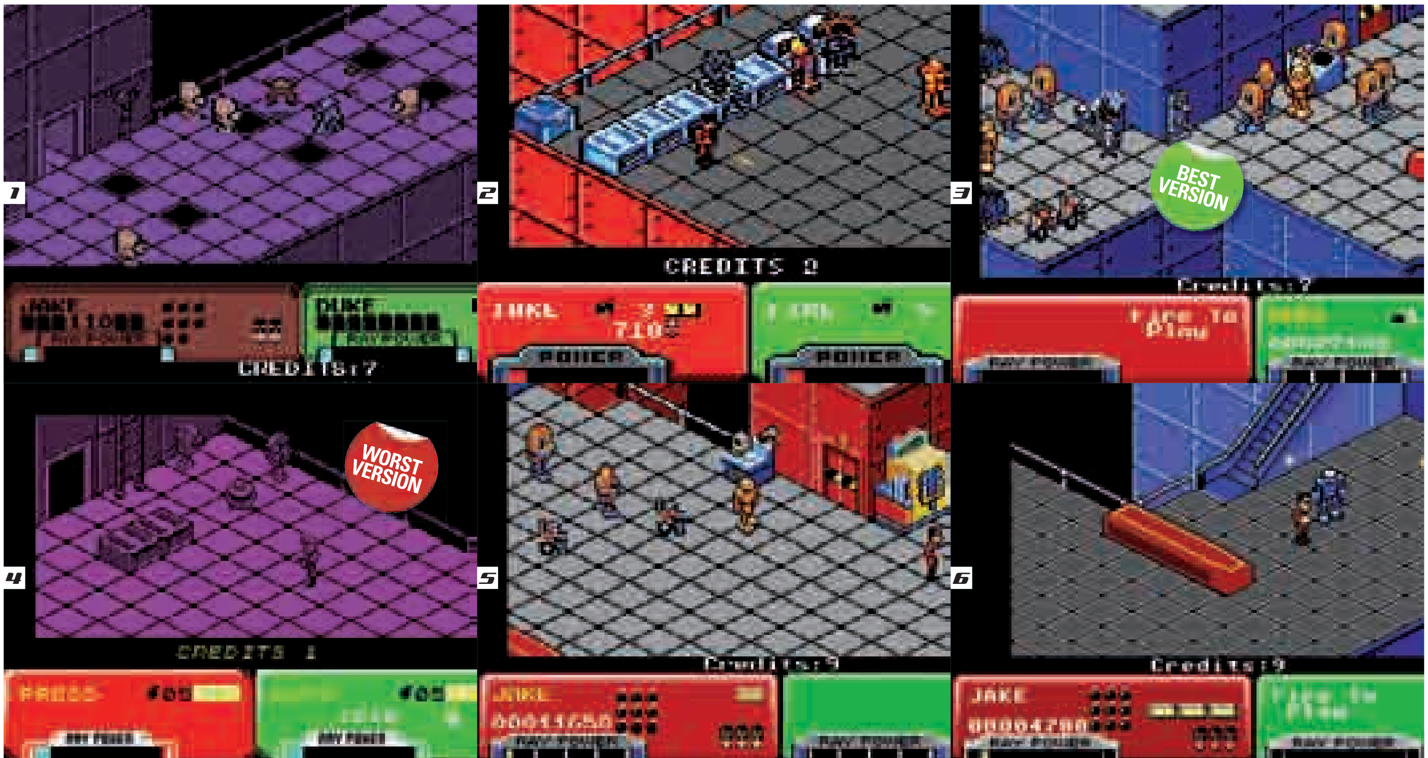


MUTANT STORM RELOADED
Version Featured: Xbox Live Arcade
Year Released: 2005



GEOMETRY WARS: GALAXIES
Version Featured: Wii
Year Released: 2007

THE CONVERSIONS



1. COMMODORE 64
Amazingly, while the C64 is easily the ugliest 8-bit version, it ends up being the most fun to play, simply because it doesn't suffer from the Speccy and Amstrad's naff control system. Like the other 8-bit versions it lacks the insane amount of on-screen enemies that the coin-op boasts, but at least it's easy to control.

2. AMSTRAD
While its slick, cartoony visuals easily manage to mimic the excellent graphics of the arcade game – making it the best looking 8-bit conversion – this Amstrad effort is just too fiddly to play. Ultimate-style controls may be fine for slower-paced games like *Knight Lore* and *Alien 8*, but they're no good in a shoot-'em-up.

3. AMIGA
Thank God. The Amiga port, like the C64 outing, uses traditional control methods to move Jake and Duke. This is very handy, as the number of enemies has been ramped up, and the game now offers a more significant challenge than the 8-bit versions. Throw in some excellent music and presentation and we have a winner.

4. SPECTRUM
The monochrome visuals and fiddly controls don't do it any favours, but this is a very faithful port of the arcade original, even if the levels have been cut down and it's missing the racing sections. Animation is well-drawn though and it all cracks along at pace. If only there was a bit more happening on screen…

5. ATARI ST
There's little to choose between the Atari and Amiga outings. The on-screen action appeared to be a little more frenetic on the Amiga, and the music seemed that little bit clearer, but otherwise the two appear virtually indistinguishable. It also has the same, easy-to-use controls, so track it down if you love your ST.

6. DOS
There's nothing wrong with the controls, and all the wacky humour has been retained, but the limited palette and simplistic sound has the DOS version of *Escape* trailing far behind its 16-bit peers. It also suffers from the bare bones level layouts of the 8-bit conversions. It tries hard, but this is very disappointing stuff.

you're either going to have to have the skills of a god or incredibly deep pockets if you ever intend to reach the game's final screen. Playing like a cross between *Gauntlet* and *Robotron*, you're constantly assaulted by an insane, unrelenting number of robots, all eager to stop your rescue mission before it's even begun. As with *Robotron: 2084*, you're constantly required to keep on the move, as standing in one place for too long will result in a deadly droid being launched that can quickly drain your energy bar with a number of well-placed shots.

Fortunately, mowing down hordes of droids usually results in them leaving a crystal behind, which in turn will slow charge your laser, then there's the fact that you have a number of bombs that will destroy anything that's unlucky enough to be standing next to you. Add in simple puzzles like switches that need flicking, a specific number of humans that need rescuing on each stage – careful though, as they can easily be shot dead – and some great co-operative play and *Escape* becomes a satisfying melting pot of game mechanics, lovingly wrapped up with a satirical bow.

Sadly, *Escape*, despite receiving some relatively good scores in certain magazines, never really generated too much attention on home systems. This was possibly down to the fact that Domark had blessed the game with a highly awkward control system, which took an age to master, or that many versions simply lacked the insane amount of sprites that appeared in the arcade original, and therefore lost much of the adrenalin rush that you received from playing the coin-op version.

Escape From The Planet Of The Robot Monsters certainly isn't going to appeal to everyone, but if you're prepared to give it a go, you'll discover a blaster that's as action-packed as it is humorous.

THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR



SWITCHES
You're not going to be able to reach certain levels when escalators are out of order, so find these handy switches and turn that juice back on.



LOCKERS
If you're running low on bombs or health simply hunt out these handy lockers. Blast them open and you'll be able to pilfer their juicy innards.



HUMANS
There are plenty of human slaves dotted around each stage, so try to collect as many as you can. Careful though, as accidental stray shots will send them to their maker.



PORT-O-MATIC
This bizarre looking device will suck you up and spit you out at the beginning of the next stage. You'll have to destroy a lot of robots to reach it though.

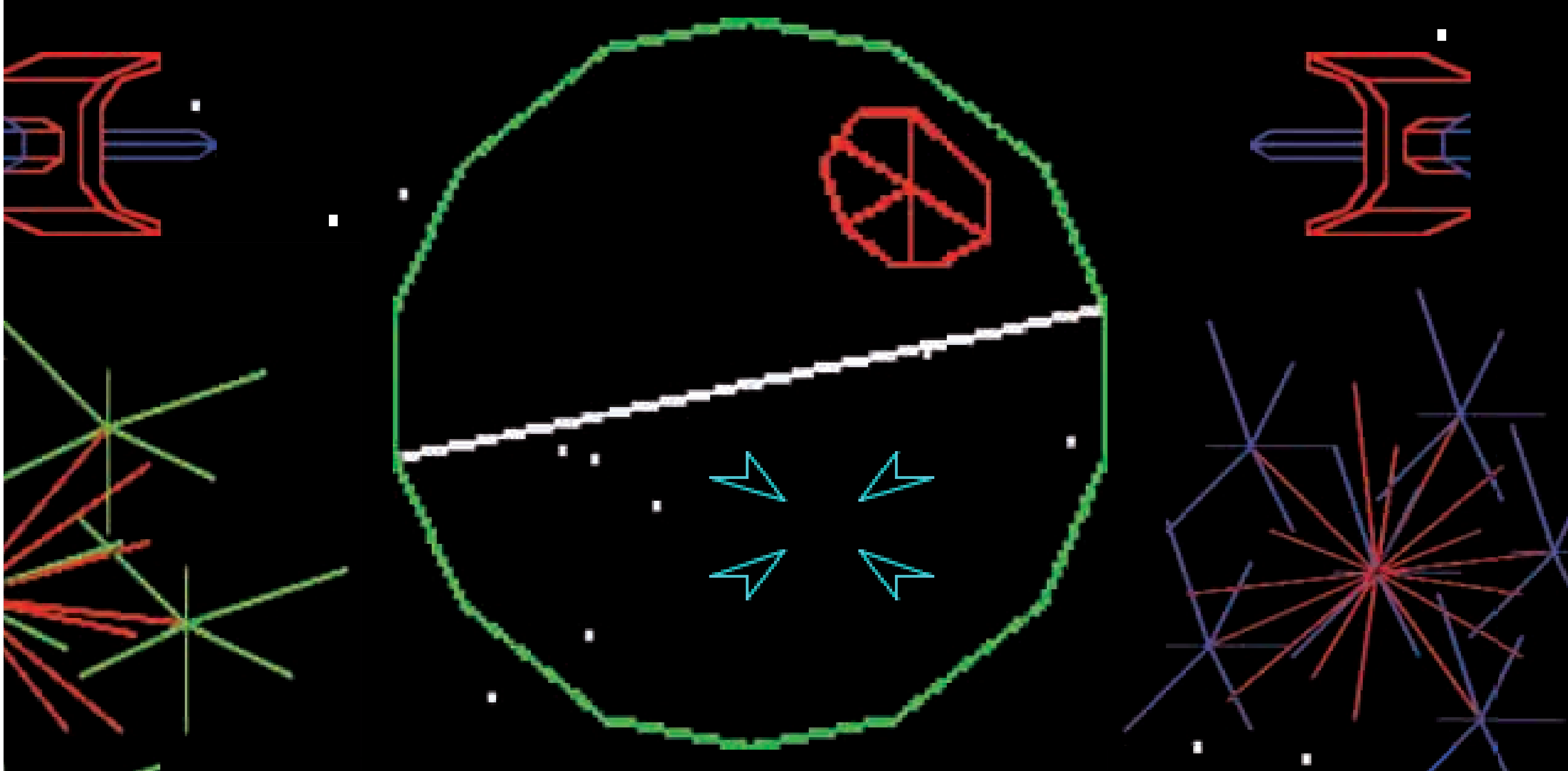
TRY THIS NEXT

It's a rather obvious one, but *Robotron: 2084* is one of the greatest blasters that's ever been made. Always challenging, and with the sort of visuals that only the wonderful early arcade games were fortunate to possess. It's a stunning game that will really test your reflexes and hand-eye co-ordination like no other shooter can. While many of you will no doubt want to go to MAME for the 'authentic' experience, there's also a surprisingly good adaptation on Xbox Live Arcade. Failing that hunt down the original *Midway Classics* which is available on both the PlayStation 2 and Xbox.

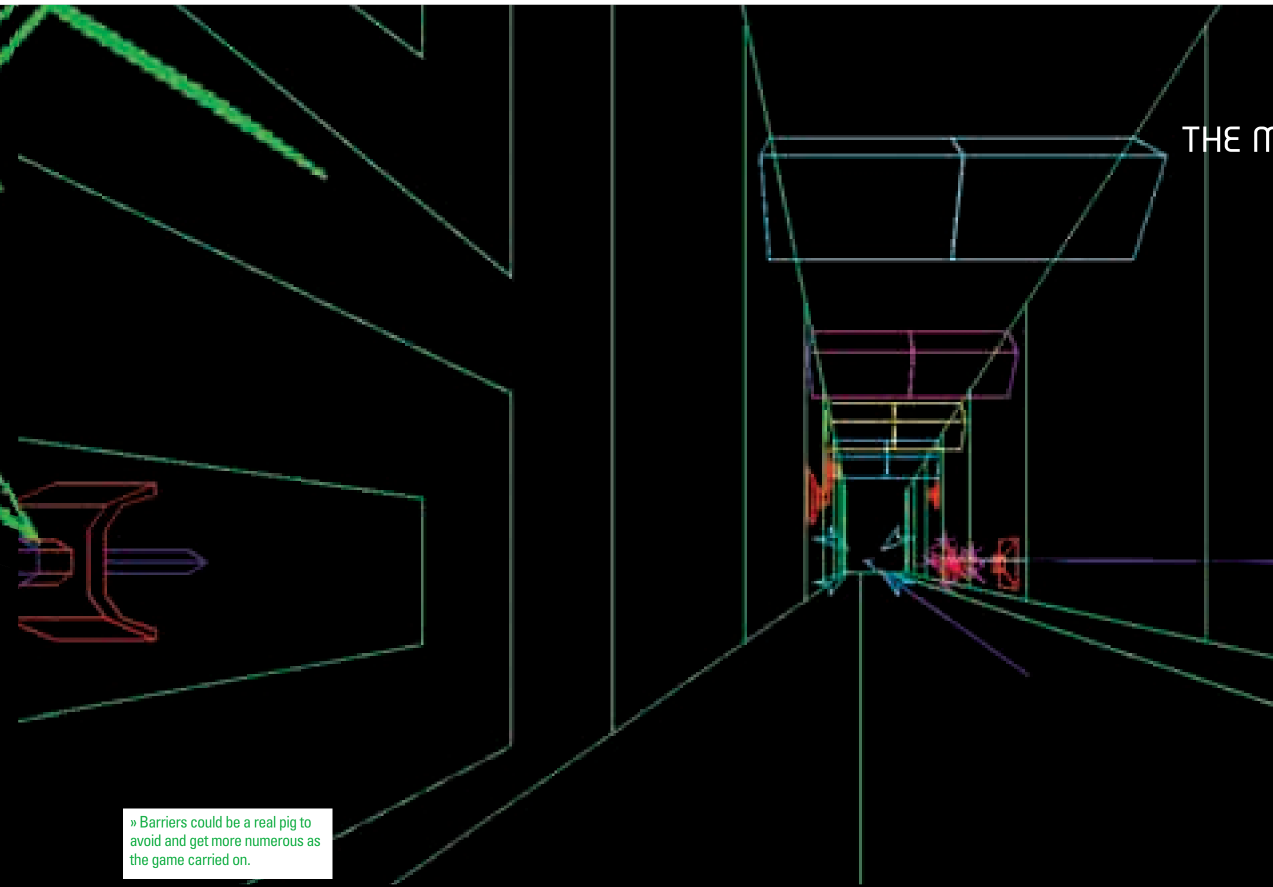


THE MAKING OF...

STAR WARS



A long time ago, but not in a galaxy far, far away, Atari created an incredible vector graphics videogame based on George Lucas's Star Wars film. Darran Jones uses the Force to track down its project leader, Mike Hally, to discover how the hit coin-op was created. Many Bothans died to bring you this information



» Barriers could be a real pig to avoid and get more numerous as the game carried on.

The *Star Wars* saga is easily one of the most famous film franchises of all time and has made its creator George Lucas a very rich and powerful man. It also happens to have had more videogame adaptations than any other film – the first, an Atari 2600 re-creation of *The Empire Strikes Back*, was released in 1982 – and, some 26 years later, it shows little sign of slowing down. You can read about the franchise's rich and varied history on page 24 of this fine issue, as our current focus is on Atari's *Star Wars* coin-op – easily one of the greatest videogames to ever bear the *Star Wars* name.

Impossibly slick, with booming digitised speech and an instantly recognisable sit-down cabinet – a smaller, stand-up version also existed – *Star Wars* was a thing of beauty and remains an utterly absorbing shoot-'em-up and a stunning example of how well videogames could capture the essence of a completely different medium. Amazingly, however, it didn't actually start off as a *Star Wars* videogame at all…

"The *Star Wars* game came about because I wanted to do a 3D space war game. I mean, I really wanted to do a 3D space war game," reveals Jed Margolin, *Star Wars*' main programmer and the driving force behind the classic game, on his personal website. "It's why I went to work for Atari. Even before going to Atari I had already worked out the math for 3D that did not use homogeneous co-ordinates. The use of homogeneous co-ordinates just gets in the way of understanding what is really going on in 3D."

"This is a first-person game using 3D perspective graphics."

With this simple sentence – part of Jed's far larger game idea proposal – *Warp Speed* was put forward as a potential game project. This was 14 November 1979. Effectively *Battlezone* in space, the document stated that *Warp Speed* would place the player in the cockpit of a space fighter and would pit them against a like-minded opponent – two cabinets could be linked together to achieve this – while the stars and enemy space fighter would be handled as three-dimensional projected figures. The computer opponent would self-adjust to the player's skill level and games would be time-based, with the player winning bonus time depending on how well they played. There was even a suggestion to tie it in with a possible space movie, or *Star Wars II* as Jed called what would eventually become *The Empire Strikes Back*.

Warp Speed was given the green light and Jed began to assemble his team. Greg Rivera was on programming duties, while Ed Rotberg would step in as the game's project leader. But then disaster struck. "Ed, along with Howard Delman, left the company and started their own company, Vidia, which was later bought by Nolan Bushnell and folded into Sente. Greg and I needed a project leader and selected Mike Hally. Usually, the project leader selects the team, but in this case the team selected the project leader." After an initial stall, *Warp Speed* was back on.

"Jed was a truly terrific hardware engineer for Atari and had been working on a higher-powered vector graphics hardware since Atari had had some success with games such as *Asteroids*, *Lunar Lander* and *Gravitar*," recalls Mike about his early recollections of working on the game.

"As I remember, I had finished *Gravitar* with Rich Adam and was working on some new game concepts when someone in the licensing/marketing department approached the engineering group to find out if the new hardware Jed Margolin was working on was capable of doing a *Star Wars* game."

Mike was soon hard at work creating storyboards with Dave Ralston, which would not only describe the style and flow of the game, but would be used by Atari to potentially pitch *Warp Speed* to the newly formed LucasGames. After a few internal meetings, Mike was ready to pitch the *Star Wars* game design to the licensing group at LucasGames.

"I remember the meeting going very well, and sometime shortly after this meeting I was informed that we had a licence agreement with Lucas to do the coin-operated *Star Wars* project," recalls a clearly pleased Mike. "I was very excited to be a part of this experience with Atari and to be rubbing shoulders with the likes of George Lucas. As far as Jed picking me to be the project leader, I really do not remember how much control he had in this decision, but I'm pretty sure he did have some major input in the final decision."

Warp Speed officially turned into the *Star Wars* project in January 1982, a good 26 months after Jed first pitched his idea. With the game ready to go, Mike and Jed quickly assembled the rest of the team who would take part in *Star Wars*' gruelling 18-month schedule. Earl Vickers took on the

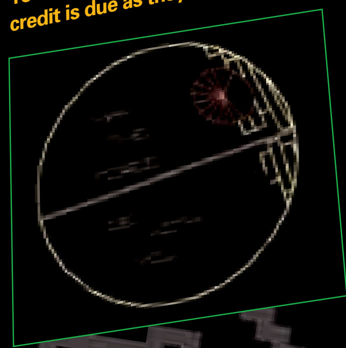
What's In A Name?

Back in the early days of videogaming, Atari was notorious for not crediting the authors of its games. The arcade release of Star Wars was no different, so Mike and the rest of the team hatched a cunning plan to ensure that their hard work wouldn't go unnoticed.

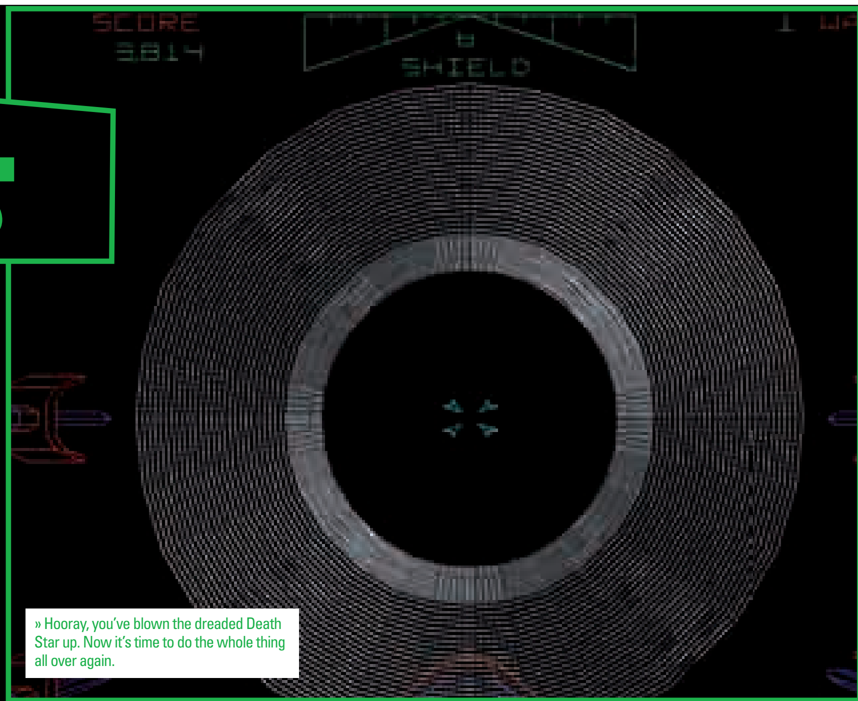
Whenever you make the final approach to the Death Star, the huge space station has either 'May the Force be with you', or the names of the team displayed on its side.

"There is a control on the monitor that allows all the lines to become visible so that the operator can make adjustments," reveals Mike about his ingenious idea. "These lines were not meant to be seen. Atari used to be afraid to publish the names of the developers in fear that other companies would steal their talent."

"Normally on the Death Star, as it zooms in, you just see what looks like random dots or lights. However, with a tweak of the monitor you can see the interconnecting lines. If my memory serves me right, Atari management did not know about this until sometime after production was well underway. I also believe that after this the game teams could add in the credit screen attract mode, a credit screen listing names and positions of team members like movies did. You need to give 'credit' where credit is due as they say!"



STAR WARS



» Hooray, you've blown the dreaded Death Star up. Now it's time to do the whole thing all over again.

Making the cut

It's rare when all the ideas during the development process make it into the final game and *Star Wars* was no exception. While Mike is more than happy with the end product, a number of ideas never actually made it into the final game. Initially it was going to be possible to have two machines linked up – a throwback to Jed's original *Warp Speed* pitch – but it never happened. While the idea was going to be finally implemented in the sequel, it never came to be. Perhaps the biggest change that never appeared in the final release was the idea of a timer that would appear in the form of diminishing fuel. Blowing up the Death Star would result in you being rewarded with a completely new fuel bar, while failing to hit the exhaust port would simply see you carrying on the next stage with whatever fuel you had left. It's certainly a bold concept and is a great way of ensuring that one person doesn't completely dominate your machine, but we're glad they went the other way.

Wars' gruelling 18-month schedule. Earl Vickers took on the duties of audio engineer; Eric Durfey was on board as technician, while Norm Avellar was eventually roped in to assist Greg Rivera on programming duties. According to Jed, the team went through several technicians before they eventually arrived at Eric because "previous techs didn't want to spend their time on a game that was a guaranteed loser". While the tiny team no doubt seems ludicrous in today's climate of huge budgets and large work teams, Mike feels that it was the perfect recipe for success.

"It was really easy to communicate ideas and issues with each other because we were all located in the same lab area," he explains. "We became a family as such, as we spent so much time with one another at work. We had our moments of fighting, arguing, laughing and our moods went through many highs and lows. Greg and I were the only team members married at the time and we both had small children at home. Everyone on this team was very good at their skill so there was a lot of mutual respect for each other. We all believed in this project so it made it fun to come to work each day and see the progress the game was making. With each step, the rest of the company started to believe in us and saw the potential the product would have."

It may have all come good in the end, but a hell of a lot of hard work had to be crammed into those 18 long months. It was even trickier for Mike, as the eventual success of the finished game meant that he was still working on it long after it came off the final production run. Unsurprisingly, with such a long gestation period and small team, the path from home-grown idea to mega-hit arcade game wasn't without its fair share of problems…

"This was the most intense project that I had ever been involved in, let alone being the project leader and game designer," recalls Mike. "Every single day was a battle of issues involving every department associated with *Star Wars*' development. From a team perspective, we were up against shared company resources, along with trying to create the impossible. New technology, a game worthy of the *Star Wars* name and a product that would out-earn any other game of the time were just some of the daily pressures we faced. And let's not forget the creation of a brand new controller, voice and music to the mix? Then, of course, there was the added pressure of creating a production-line product with a dead line that just about made us all go insane. Dealing with the licensing group just added another layer of complexity and complicated getting our work accomplished. *Star Wars* was also released in multiple cabinet configurations and was produced in two different production facilities to add to the overall difficulties. UL and FCC approved? The list goes on and on… and let's not forget the most important issue of all… this game needs to be fun for every type of gamer out there whether casual or hardcore."

> "WE BECAME A FAMILY, AS WE SPENT SO MUCH TIME WITH ONE ANOTHER AT WORK" MIKE ON HIS DEV TEAM

Of course, the blessing and curse of being able to create a *Star Wars* game was having access to that actual licence, for while it potentially meant that the game would receive a crucial head start in the arcades, it would also mean that the project would be constantly under the steely eye of George Lucas.

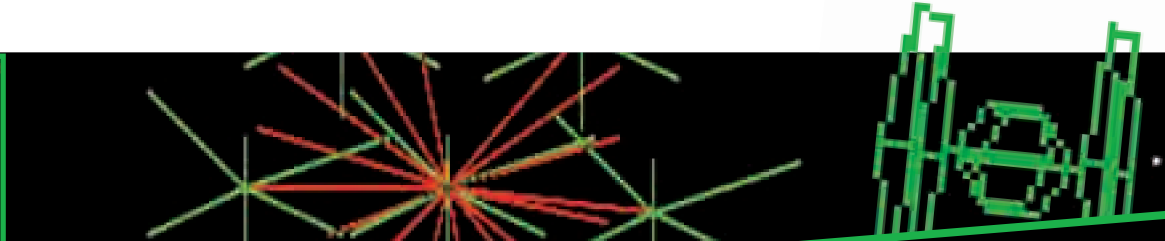
"From the initial meeting with the licensing group to all the follow-up meetings with the games department group there was one consistent theme that the Lucasfilm groups had… they were all very protective of the *Star Wars* universe and every detail had to be accurate," continues Mike. "If I had any element that was not accurate, they instantly made me aware and it had to be changed. Since they were also involved in game development, they did understand some of the decisions that I made."

The team was given a tremendous amount of resources to draw upon and had access to virtually every aspect of the film. They were sent a copy of the original script, numerous toys from which to draw inspiration and plenty of original sketches that pretty much covered every element of the movie. All the music was available for reference – as were numerous voice scripts – the only caveat was that every little detail had to be fed back to the protective publisher.

"The process used to keep them [Lucasfilm] in the loop was to invite them down to Atari to view game development until we had a system that we located on their premises," begins Mike, about the gruelling process. "I would take new ROMS (memory) up to Lucasfilm and replace them in the hardware along with a list of new features this version of



» You'll never forget the first time *Star Wars*' huge towers loom up in front of you; or how hard it is to dodge the damn things!



He's Got Game

Mike Hally had quite an illustrious time at Atari's coin-op division as the following games prove



GUARDIANS OF THE 'HOOD
Released: 1992
Role: Digitised actor (Hawker)



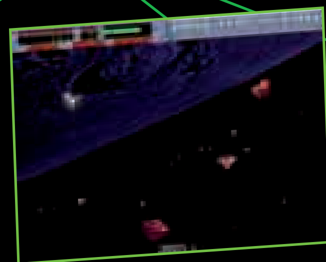
A.P.B. (ALL POINTS BULLETIN)
Released: 1987 Role: MLH

Great little game that sees you playing a cop who must pull over various law breakers within a set time limit. It's go-anywhere gameplay could be seen as an early blueprint for the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise.



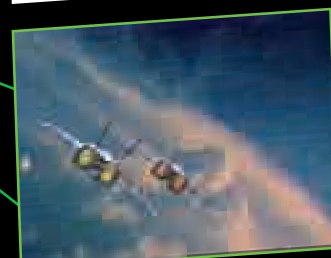
AREA 51
Released: 1995 Role: Game Design

Fairly bland, by-the-numbers lightgun game that tries desperately hard to emulate the success Sega had with the genre but fails miserably. There are some cool aliens to destroy, but this is pretty generic stuff.



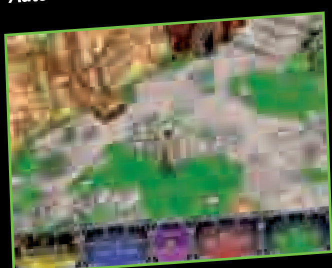
BLASTEROIDS
Released: 1987 Role: MLH

Atari's fourth game in the *Asteroids* series offered a huge boss to fight, plenty of different power-ups and an enjoyable two-player mode. A solid shooter that's only let down by its muddy looking visuals.



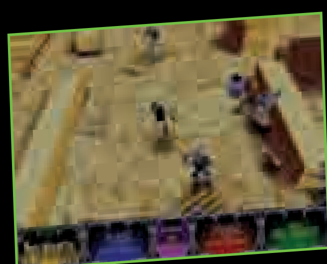
FIREFOX
Released: 1983 Role: Project Leader

This Laserdisc release was based on the 1982 Clint Eastwood film (which in turn was based on Craig Thomas's 1978 thriller). Taking on the role of Eastwood's character, it features several sequences from the film.



GAUNTLET DARK LEGACY
Released: 1999
Role: Producer/Game Design

This sequel to *Gauntlet Legends* offers several additions such as the ability to make slow and fast attacks, as well as four new characters: Sorceress, Knight, Dwarf and Jester.



GAUNTLET LEGENDS
Released: 1998 Role: Producer

Unlike many games of the time, this fun update of the classic franchise enabled players to use passwords so characters could be saved. It was also the first time you could level up in the franchise.



GRAVITAR
Released: 1982 Role: Designer

Great little shooter that had impressive visuals and varied gameplay that paved the way for the likes of *Oids* and *Thrust*. Yes, it can be extremely hard at times but perseverance reaps its own rewards.



AKKA ARRH
Released: 1982
Role: Designer/Programmer

Early release that isn't currently emulatable in MAME, so you're going to have a tricky time playing it unless you own an original cab. It was originally known as *Target Outpost*.



INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM
Released: 1985 Role: Producer

Fun take on the film that has Indy whipping snakes and Thuggee guards, swinging over chasms with his whip and recovering the Sankara stones. The highlight is easily the mine chase.



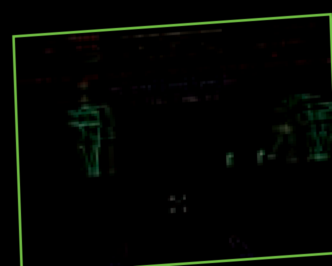
ROAD RUNNER
Released: 1985 Role: Director

It's a great use of the *Road Runner* licence, but certain sections are so difficult that all the 'meep meeps' and cute animations in the world won't stop you from wanting to put your head through the monitor's screen.



S.T.U.N. RUNNER
Released: 1989 Role: Overlord

An excellent, fast-paced futuristic racer that combines impossibly slick visuals with fast-paced action to create an exhilarating experience that will still leave you breathless with excitement.



THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK
Released: 1985
Role: Product Manager

This sequel to *Star Wars* does push the technology – there's lots happening on screen – but it's not quite as fun to play. A worthy sequel, but not as spectacular as the game that spawned it.

THE MAKING OF... STAR WARS



» Watching the tower stages morph into the Death Star's trench remains one of the game's most thrilling moments.

the program contained. I would always give a demo of the current game design and discuss what would be coming next. They had to approve all game text, copyright information, cabinet artwork, operator manual and so on. Just think of all the money this company has made on licensing books, games and toys. My last memory of working with Lucasfilm on this project was driving the Atari truck to the ranch to drop off a production sit-down cabinet, which was part of the licensing agreement. It was a great feeling knowing that we had accomplished so much and everyone was really pleased with the final outcome."

Although Mike has fond memories of Lucasfilm, he'll be the first to admit that working with a company that had such a fastidious attention to detail meant that sometimes they weren't always on the same wavelength. A typical example is a memo posted on Jed's website, which shows a list of small and seemingly petty changes that Lucasfilm was adamant on having corrected. One note insisted that shields were made of energy, not metal, as pilots wouldn't be able to fight if a sheet of metal obstructed their view whenever they were fired upon, while no 'gunner exists in an X-Wing because it is piloted by a single person with the help of an R2 unit'. The best, however, was a chastising for using the term 'parcels' instead of 'parsecs', which was then followed by a long explanation saying that even this wouldn't be the appropriate term as even a single parsec would be 3.26 light years and the Death Star wouldn't be visible at that range. With no Earth term being suitable it was suggested that 'light tics' should be used instead. Fortunately, Mike always took these requests in good humour.

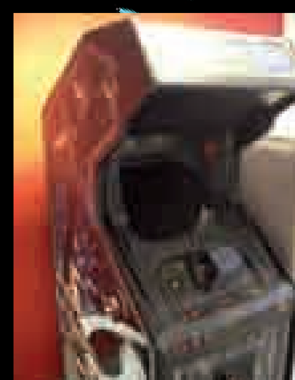
"I remember laughing to myself because they were overly consumed with these little tiny issues and we had been worried about some other much bigger issues," Mike recalls about that particular memo. "The team was really relieved to hear back from Lucas and we were glad that their main points were so minor."

While Lucasfilm proved to be far more receptive than the team had originally imagined, Mike and the rest of the crew nevertheless found themselves constantly under pressure due to the sheer amount of interest that the potentially lucrative licence was constantly generating. "Oh it never stopped," continues Mike. "There were two main areas of extreme pressure. One was from the company and their need for this game to get finished and be a huge success, while the other was internal pressure from within the team to be a part of something special and make a name for ourselves. I think every development team at Atari was under a lot of pressure to perform and create magic, but the *Star Wars* coin-op was a new and different venture for us so it just magnified the expectations everyone had. Everyone on the team cracked at one point or another during the development but we all stood the test of time. We eventually went on to work on many other games together so I would have to say that as a team we overcame the fear of pressure and learned to actually enjoy it."

"EVERYONE ON THE TEAM CRACKED AT ONE POINT DURING DEVELOPMENT"
MIKE ON PRESSURES FACED BY THE TEAM

When you consider how popular *Star Wars* now is, it's difficult to imagine how the eventual coin-op could have ever been seen as anything less than a huge hit. However, when you look at the type of games that were available at the time, the fact that it was released in what would become one of the most trying times for the industry (the great videogame crash) and the technology that Atari was striving to perfect, it's no real surprise that it wasn't always plain sailing. While this wasn't the first vector graphics game that Atari had worked on, it was going to have to be sufficiently more fast-paced than the rather sedate speed of *Battlezone* if it was to capture the exhilarating excitement of the film's final battle. Luckily, this is where Jed's efficiency became readily apparent and the talented programmer ended up making the visuals a little too spectacular.

"Originally, the 3D math that *Star Wars* was capable of performing allowed any object (and the observer) to be in any orientation," confirms Jed. "However, it was eventually decided that players might be confused by being approached



» Our very own *Star Wars* arcade cab. Darran currently has the high score… Honest.

by an upside-down TIE fighter, so they were forced to be right-side up most of the time."

"We ended up going with vector graphics because Atari felt that they were best suited to *Star Wars*' development and what it required based on the original game designs," continues Mike. "It was one of the first three-dimensional games and at the time it was the only display that we had access to that had a chance of pulling off what we wanted to achieve. At this time in the evolution of videogames almost every coin-operated game had its own custom hardware to maximise the needs for the specific requirements of the game."

Despite the difficulties of using vectors and specific custom ROMs, all of the hard work eventually paid off in rather spectacular style. Few gamers will forget the first time that they saw a whole squadron of TIE fighters roar past them, or how they sat entranced as they watched the towers they were blasting at spin crazily around until the Death Star's ominous looking trench was formed. Massive fireballs exploded in front of your very eyes, Vader's TIE would swoop ominously around the screen, impervious to your firepower, while later runs through that dangerous trench had you dodging numerous barriers that speed towards you at ever-quickening speeds. The simplistic-looking, but oh so striking, vectors created a beautifully immersive atmosphere that was further enhanced by the carefully picked snatches of music and speech that played throughout your assault.

"The Force will be with you, always," "Yahoo", "Use the Force" and "You're all clear, kid" were just a small number of the classic lines that greeted your ears and the experience was only heightened by John Williams' wonderfully rousing – if shortly looped – score. For many though it was the beautifully crafted sit-down cockpit and cabinet that helped to give off that true *Star Wars* experience. And amazingly, it almost didn't happen.

THE FORCE IS STRONG WITH THESE ONES...

The numerous conversions of Star Wars



SPECTRUM

While the majority of 8-bit home conversions are fairly respectable, even the most hardcore Speccy fan will admit that this port isn't without a few issues. Yes, it's very accurate and sports some nicely drawn visuals, but the sluggish pace and lack of sound in-game does dampen the overall experience somewhat. It's certainly a fun game, but it's a shame it's not a little faster.



AMSTRAD

Considering our Amstrad background, it's somewhat difficult to champion the machine without being called biased. Nevertheless we're staunch defenders of the Amstrad port, even if it does lose out ever so slightly to the far nippier Commodore 64 version. A solid and enjoyable conversion.



COMMODORE 64 (DOMARK VERSION)

The graphics are horrifically chunky, but there's no denying that this is otherwise a decent port of the classic arcade hit. Boasting a great rendition of the theme tune and solid in-game spot effects, this is great stuff and well worth a quick blast. A slightly iffier version exists in the US and was created by Parker Bros, not Domark.



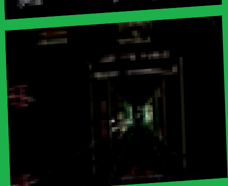
AMIGA

Many purists will argue that this is actually superior to the original arcade game, and it's very easy to see their point. Mouse control gives you amazing accuracy over your cross hairs; the graphics are extremely faithful to the 1983 coin-op, while the addition of extra sound chips is the icing on a very pretty cake.



ATARI 2600

We've seen some 2600 games suffer from dreadful flicker, but this Parker effort (ironically Atari didn't have the actual rights to produce its own home version of its own coin-op) is truly atrocious. A real pity, as the actual gameplay is pretty good. It's just a shame you can't play it without getting a killer headache.



ATARI ST

While it's extremely similar to the Amiga version, Commodore's machine just clinches it thanks to slightly clearer speech (there were more samples on offer as well) and sound and far smoother, slicker visuals. It's still a strong conversion of the classic game though and a must-have for Atari ST owners.



ATARI 5200

Although it boasts some decent visuals, it's very hard to recommend this 5200 effort, mainly because of the truly horrific collision detection that rears its head throughout the game. It's incredibly frustrating to watch TIE fighters not get blown apart by your perfectly placed hits and the clunky controls are the final straw.



COLECOVISION

This is so much better than the 2600 and 5200 ports that it's not funny. Boasting far superior visuals, little flicker and solid controls, this is easily one of the better conversions that's available on the earlier systems. Yet another ColecoVision game that was better than its Atari 2600 counterpart and a stunning conversion in its own right.



ATARI 8-BIT

Although there's a fair amount of flickering on display – although nowhere near as bad as the 2600 version – this is a surprisingly good conversion and nips along at an incredibly fast pace. In fact, after some extensive play it's probably become our favourite 8-bit version of the game, even beating the mighty C64 effort.



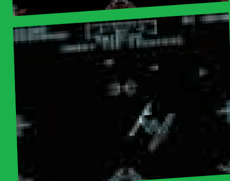
DOS

Its limited colour palette means that it's unable to match the sheer vibrancy of the Amiga and ST versions and the sound is rather disappointing, but this is otherwise a fairly solid conversion. It plays at a decent pace and has great control due to utilising the mouse. It's a bugger to run in DOS BOX though so be prepared for a lot of fiddling around.



BBC MICRO

We were pleasantly surprised by the BBC Micro version of *Star Wars*, as it's actually pretty darn slick. Faster than many of the other 8-bit versions, with visuals that are somewhere between the Commodore 64 and Amstrad outings it's a surprisingly faithful conversion that should be in any BBC owner's collection.



ACORN ELECTRON

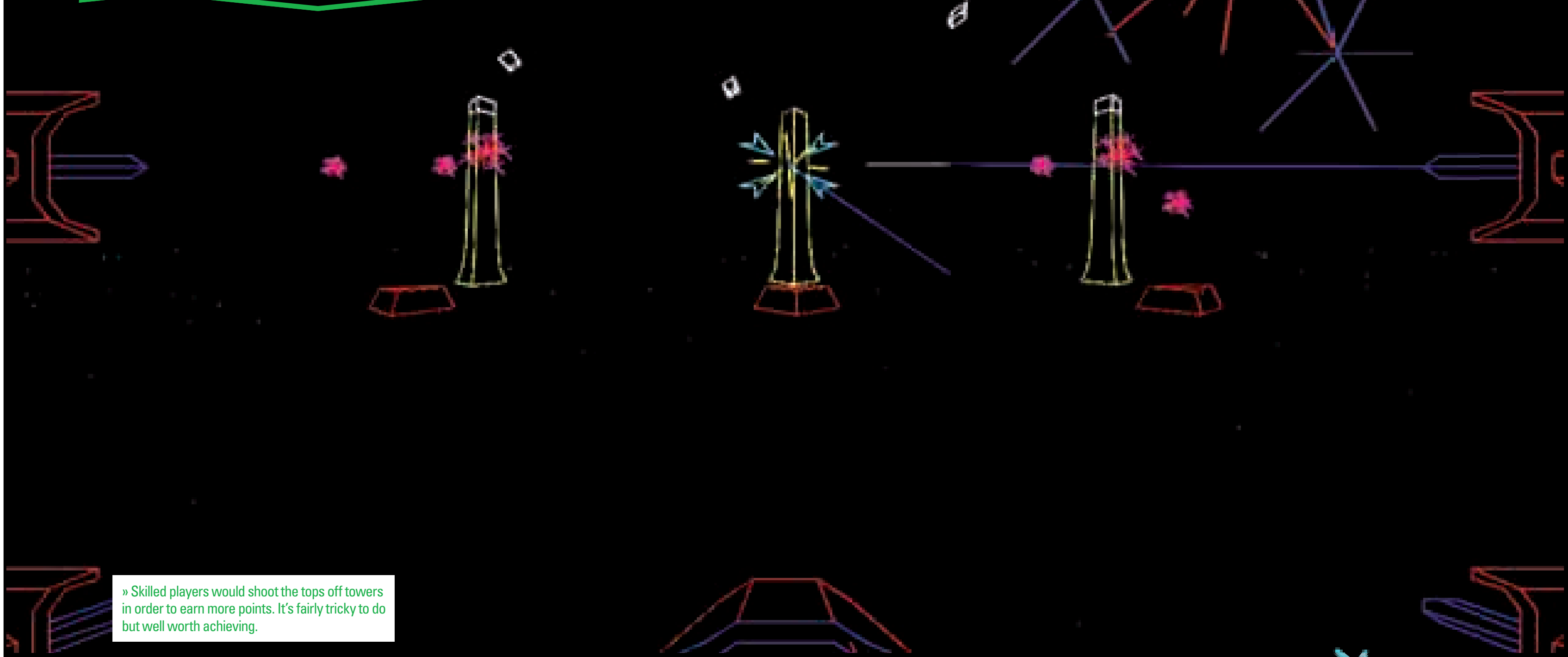
Like far too many Electron titles, this game plays like a slightly senile relative of the BBC Micro version. It's comparatively sluggish and sadly monochrome, making it very difficult to target the fireballs, but generally it's as faithful as Electron owners could realistically expect from the underpowered machine.



APPLE MAC

With its razor-sharp graphics, scratchy samples and mouse-driven controls, Domark's Mac conversion is pretty faithful to the arcade original, albeit in monochrome form. It offers a surprisingly tough game, though, so only Jedis need to apply here, as anyone else is going to have a mighty struggle on their hands.

THE MAKING OF... STAR WARS



» Skilled players would shoot the tops off towers in order to earn more points. It's fairly tricky to do but well worth achieving.

The cabinet was initially equipped with a joystick, but early testing revealed that it confused people, as they didn't know which way to move it. Still, those early test periods proved crucial as it allowed Mike and the rest of the team to secure extra money for a far more suitable controller.

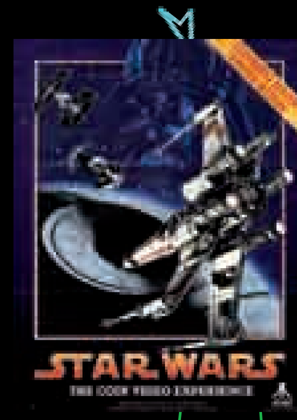
"The control yoke for *Star Wars* was a downsized version of the control from *Army Battlezone* (minus the palm switches), which came directly from an actual Bradley Fighting Vehicle (it was the gunner's control)," explains Jed about the unusual controller's original origins. "I wanted it to be based on every child's experience with riding a bike," continues Mike. "It was all about putting both your hands on the handles and pressing the triggers. Everyone immediately knows what to do and no one ever forgets. It was the perfect player input to play the game and really feel in total control of what you were attempting to do."

Although the device helped give the finished game that final touch, it was far from perfect as Jed reveals, which explains why the centring for the control yoke isn't always perfect. "*Star Wars* originally used a Pokey to read the pots," he reveals. "At that time, people either made their own A/D converter with a counter, a comparator, and a ramp, or they used Pokey. The Pokey was a full custom IC designed for the Atari 800/400 to read pots and keys, which gave it its name, 'POTs' and 'KEYs'. Unfortunately, Pokey does a really awful job of reading pots; it is guaranteed to produce occasional wrong values. The software to deal with it is pretty nasty. After Greg Rivera brought this to my attention I took the daring step of actually putting in a real A/D, the ADC-0809. Unfortunately, many people continued to use the original code to treat the A/D values as though they had come from a Pokey. Like Greg. That is why the controller in *Star Wars* keeps getting re-centred, usually badly."

It wasn't just the software that proved to be an issue, as creating the actual hardware wasn't without its issues either. "The device was a major undertaking for the mechanical engineering department," explains Mike. "I had started at Atari as a mechanical engineer in the Pinball Division so I knew exactly what I wanted and how it could be constructed. The entire project to get this controller into production was crazy. I remember there was a flood in the town where the moulds for the handle grips were being made, so we had to take a rowboat from one building to another to try to get some prototype handles ready for our initial field test."

Indeed, it was field tests that often proved to be essential for the success of many early arcade games and Atari was particularly adept at responding to the constructive feedback that was given at these focus groups.

"We had our very first focus group on 24 January 1983," explains Mike about the important event. "The actual gameplay on offer was very rough, as the tower and trench phases were just in the beginning stages of development. Overall though, the players thought the game had great potential and liked the idea of having voices and music



» Atari kept interest in *Star Wars* high by systematically releasing early, tantalising flyers.

Light side, Dark side

After working on such a huge project like *Star Wars*, we were keen to know Mike's favourite and worst moments about working on the classic arcade game.

"One of my biggest thrills was my trip back to New York where I did radio and television spots with our marketing department," Mike recalls. "It was kind of like being a rock star. I was on a television show and got to show off *Star Wars* in a sit-down cabinet that the whole world saw. It was exciting and a very new world for me to be a part of. Receiving my first six-figure bonus cheque at the age of 28 was also a moment that I will never forget. I still remember my body trembling when I opened up the envelope and saw that big number."

But what about the worst moment, Mike?

"That's easily the toughest question you've asked me," he begins. "There were definitely many times that I was so tired and fed up with everything that I just wanted to either die or quit, but then something good would always happen. If I'm honest, I can't really remember any one horrific moment. It's funny how things change when you have success, as all you can ever remember are the good times."

playing from the movie. They also thought that a sit-down version of the game would help add realism to he experience."

Responding to the aforementioned issues with the original joystick and the need for a bigger cabinet, work on *Star Wars* continued and Mike began to tally up the final costs for creating the behemoth cabinet. Total material costs came to an expensive $1,249.00. A large amount of money for the time, but a positively insane amount of cash when you realise that Atari's game was actually going to be released in one of the industry's most turbulent times. Were Mike and the team not worried about creating such an expensive product during the videogame crash?

"Now that you ask the question it does scare me," continues Mike, "although it was not my job to make sure that the company was financially solvent. Atari had other divisions but I was not sure how the company as a whole was doing then. From my perspective, the company shelled out $1 million for the licence and I never feared for my job so I just felt everything was in fine shape. I was so busy with trying to make this game a success; I was blinded as to the decline in videogame sales for the year. I do remember feeling bad for our workers in the production building though. If we did not have product for them to build then they did not have a job for a while. I felt somewhat responsible for making sure I did what I could during my career to keep the factory running at all costs."

Despite being released during one of videogaming's bleakest times, *Star Wars* was an immediate success and instantly became the number one selling arcade game, although sadly, this success was short-lived due to *Dragon's Lair* getting released two weeks later. Nevertheless, all the hard work, effort and cost was worth it, with over 15,000 machines being sold for a grand total of $15 million, not bad at all for a period that Jed and the rest of Atari described as 'going supernova'. Indeed, Jed is adamant that *Star Wars*' success was the main reason why the arcade division wasn't shut down that year and it wasn't until the end of 1983 that the team discovered that Atari Games had barely broken even, and that had included the $15 million generated by *Star Wars*.

After proving to be such a huge hit in the arcades it was hardly surprising when Domark announced that it would be bringing the game to home computers in 1987. Despite a four-year wait, and fairly inferior hardware, the 8-bit machines of the time did a pretty good job of capturing the spirit of the arcade original, and while the Amiga and Atari ST versions were easily the most impressive, special mention must also go to the rather excellent home port that appeared on the ColecoVision. While the home versions sold very well, Mike and the rest of the team had no involvement with them and even less time to actually play them.

"The thing about being a part of a game development team is that once you finish one game, you just roll right into the next one," explains Mike. "In the case of *Star Wars*, Atari did a great job in licensing our game to many different home game platforms and if I'm honest I remember getting royalty cheques from them more than remembering which company did what kind of job with our finished game. Atari would always give me a certain number of copies of these games though to give out to team members, which I thought was a class move and a nice motivator."

Although it was followed by two sequels – one with vectors, the later with sprites, which actually came out between the two vector games – neither of them ignite quite the same feelings as their superior predecessor and it's a testament to the game's brilliance and success that it's the only arcade machine we actually happen to have in the office. *Star Wars*, perhaps more than any other licence of the era, was able to offer you an immersion and atmosphere that was second to none, and it's the feeling of actually being within the film that to us, makes it so special.

"*Star Wars* captured the essence of one of the greatest properties ever created for the big screen and beyond," agrees Mike. "It allowed someone to become Luke Skywalker and play an interactive role just like what people viewed on the big screen. It had just the right mix of all the elements it takes to make a winner… For me, it's a true timeless piece of history and art."

"IT HAD THE RIGHT MIX OF ALL THE ELEMENTS IT TAKES TO MAKE A WINNER"
MIKE ON WHY STAR WARS WAS A SUCCESS



» TIE fighters soon start coming thick and fast and launch an insane amount of fireballs at you.

"GETTING OCEAN ON BOARD WAS ESSENTIAL. IT WAS ONE OF THE BIGGEST PUBLISHERS IN EUROPE, A POWERFUL SOFTWARE HOUSE THAT WOULD HELP SELL THE NEW CONSOLE"



AMSTRAD GX4000

FUTURISTIC STYLING, A BULLISH SIR ALAN SUGAR, A MAJOR DEVELOPER ON BOARD… WHEN AMSTRAD LAUNCHED ITS SPACESHIP-STYLED GX4000 CONSOLE, SURELY NOTHING COULD GO WRONG. BUT, AS DAVID CROOKES REVEALS, IT MARKED THE END OF AMSTRAD'S GAMING AMBITIONS



Year released: 1990

Original price: £99

Buy it now for: £15+

Associated magazines: Amstrad Action, Amstrad Computer User, Mean Machines

Why the GX4000 was great… It's hard to give a valid reason for why the GX4000 was great because it wasn't. It was deeply flawed. It's poor quality controllers and paltry range of games led to terrible sales and there were nails in the coffin before it was even launched. But, although the console flopped, having cartridge capabilities in the Plus range of computers was a bonus. It allowed Amstrad to keep the CPC going for a few more years and it helped latter-day developers get more graphical power from their disk-based games.

Gary Bracey is sitting at a table. Around him are some of his colleagues from Ocean Software and sitting a few seats away is Alan Sugar, boss of Amstrad. Next to him is Malcolm Miller, Amstrad's chief executive and they are all gathered at the electronic giant's headquarters in Brentwood, Essex. It is 1990 and they are ready to do business. A product is about to be launched that promises to take on the world and cement Amstrad's power as a major force in computing.

Due to his immense success in electronics – the CPC, the PCW, the PC, the hi-fi and the Sky TV dishes – Sugar is confident. At stake is the future of the Amstrad CPC, a series of machines born with the 464 in 1984 and evolved with the short-lived 664 and the better received 6128. Not one to stand still, Sugar proposes to do away with the black rectangular machines that had proved so popular in France and Spain and that had allowed Amstrad to compete against the Commodore 64 and Spectrum in the UK. Riding into town to replace them, he told the Ocean contingent, were the shiny sheriffs – the Amiga-esque, white coloured new models that took the CPC, bolted on a cartridge port and enabled them to compete with anything else the market could throw at them in opposition.

But, more importantly, there was the standalone, keyboardless machine: the GX4000 gaming console, that dispensed with the tape and disk drives and monitors. This, Sugar explained, was the future of gaming, a system to beat Sega's Master System and the NES and so his abrasive manner was out in force. His new battalion was going to take no prisoners and he wanted everyone to know it.

"He had this bullish attitude," Gary recalls. "Although he was polite with the guys from Ocean – after all, he had called them together to ask them a favour – he was nevertheless straightforward in his approach and he was confident that the products he had were world-beaters. Actually, when I see him on *The Apprentice*, I think about how mellow he has become."

Following Sugar's introduction and the hard sell in which he made projections about how much money Ocean would make, Amstrad's technical gurus took over and continued to sell the console to Bracey and his gang. Getting the Manchester-based company on board was essential for Amstrad. It was one of the biggest publishers in Europe, a powerful software house that was hot on producing games based on film licences, the recognisable games, which would help to sell the new console.

"Alan Sugar was perfectly fine with us," says Gary, "since he was trying to get us to support him. It was important to him because he personally pitched the machine to us and asked to develop titles for it. The big thing he pushed was the fact that, because it was cartridge-based, piracy would be less of a problem. It was quite a meeting."



» Ocean produced a catalogue that showed off the range of games it was making at the time, including those for the GX4000.

INSTANT EXPERT

The GX4000 tried to build on the success of the 2.5 million-selller CPC range… but only 15,000 consoles were ever sold.

It was only the second UK-developed console to be released following the Grandstand console of the early Eighties.

GX4000 liked the number 16. There were 16 colours from a palette of 4,092 in low resolution, and 16 hardware sprites each measuring 16x16 and made up of 16 colours available effectively boosting number of on-screen colours to 32.

It was launched at the Hotel Meridien in Paris since the CPC range had done well in France. The CPC 464 had been launched at London's historic Westminster School.

The GX4000 came with Ocean's *Burnin' Rubber* on cartridge, two paddles, a power supply and manuals for the console and game.

Most of the £24.99 cartridge games were ports – some, unforgivably, of games available that sold for £3.99 on tape.

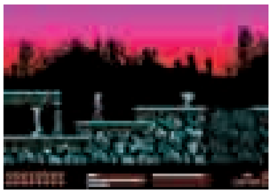
In some cases, games ported to the GX4000 had additional graphics. *Switchblade*, for example, had more splashes of colour.

The GX4000's cartridge capabilities were added to the Plus range of computers. Many homebrewers utilised this extra power… to create disk-based games.

It is understood that around 35 games were made for the system but grabbing them all could be difficult. Only recently were some shown to exist, including *Chase HQ II*.

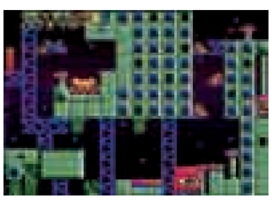
Mean Machines covered the GX4000. It was added at the last moment as a replacement for coverage of NEC's PC-Engine. Seven games were reviewed. Only *Pang* and *Switchblade* achieved more than 90 per cent.

AMSTRAD GX4000



TAPE AND DISK-BASED PLUS GAMES

Amstrad included the GX4000's capabilities in the CPC's Plus range of computers but they could only be accessed via games inserted into the cartridge port. This was implemented as an incentive for developers to produce games on cartridge that would then work on the GX4000 but it annoyed many people since it effectively barred disk and tape games from taking advantage of the increased capability. Except it didn't. Despite Amstrad's claims, the extra features were not hardware locked so it was possible to produce software that allowed access to them. This paved the way for enhanced disk and tape games. Codemasters released the Plus-enabled *Stryker In The Crypts Of Trogan* on tape and games such as Radical Software's *Fluff*, Titus Software's *Prehistorik 2* and Ocean's *Space Gun* also took advantage. Many graphical demos made use of the Plus capabilities too as did a host of utilities. It made the Plus a much more desirable machine and it was one of the bonuses of an otherwise ill-fated adventure by the Brentwood electronics giant. If Amstrad had been quick to admit it was possible to use the Plus facilities via tape or disk soon after the GX4000 died and actively plugged that fact, the Plus machines may have fared much better.



» David Darling's Codemasters considered console games, but produced a cassette game that took advantage of the Plus capabilities instead.



» The Amstrad GX4000 television advert (pulled from an advertising break on Children's ITV in 1990, check it out at www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tMt0fqM9p8) was cheesier than cheddar. But was it enough to make you want to part with your cash? No way.



The GX4000 wasn't the only computer-based console being launched at the time. Commodore was producing the 64GS, essentially the C64 without the keyboard that also made use of cartridges. Both companies were keen to make an entry into the console market and for good reason – the home computers had been hugely successful in the Eighties and the Amiga was continuing that success in the 16-bit market. Yet Nintendo and Sega were making massive inroads. To sit back and watch as consoles took over the gaming industry was not an option.

"We came away having assured Alan Sugar of a small commitment to write some games – at least until it had proven commercially viable to increase," says Gary. "As a result, we got a bunch of prototype consoles and set to work porting some titles already in the works. But, if I'm honest, we were a little cynical about it. We weren't going to bet the firm on this new console and so we decided to concentrate on creating ports from other computers first of all and see how it went."

Over the next few months, Ocean cracked on, making the games that Sugar would unveil at the plush Hotel Meridien in Paris in September 1990. It was the official press conference during which the fine details of the machines were released. Not that it came as much of a surprise – news had leaked out about an imminent launch from Amstrad a couple of months before but the console and the fresh 464 Plus and 6128 Plus still caused great excitement.

In fact, the computing press jumped all over it, despite having reservations over Amstrad's decision to base the machine on 8-bit technology. Looking at the bundled game, *Burnin' Rubber*, gamers could be sure they were seeing a machine with superb 8-bit graphical capability and, because Amstrad had been successful with the CPC and the PCW and had a big clomping foot in the PC market, it was felt that it would do well.



With 4,096 colours from which to choose, 32 of which would be displayed on screen at once, and with built-in hardware sprites, and fast, smooth hardware-scrolling, games looked similar to 16-bit titles. The console plugged into a television via the aerial socket or SCART. It was also possible to wire it into an Amstrad monitor. There was a pause button, two ports for the poorly built game controllers, a port for an analogue joystick, a slot for a lightgun and, finally, a sound button. Turn the machine on and the screen would be fuzzy. Insert the cartridge and the game would appear. For Amstrad users used to the long waits associated with tapes, it was pure joy and the line-up of games – which included *Fire And Forget II*, *Klax*, *Crazy Cars II*, *Kick Off 2* and *Batman: The Movie* – seemed impressive enough.

Sugar was confident he was on to another winner and he was pleased at having top developers on board. "We don't just see this as Amstrad fighting Nintendo and Sega, we see this as Amstrad, together with companies such as Ocean and others who want to make some money and who do not want to be dictated to, fighting against these people," he said, obviously pleased at having had Ocean's assurance that it would support the console.

Back in Manchester, the reality of this gung-ho, 'everyone together' stance was different. "Although we had agreed to work on the GX4000, there was no special software division created for the console or anything like that," says Bracey. "It was pretty much the same people who were working on the computer versions anyway. The console versions were 'adaptations' of the regular ones. Until the console proved to be more viable to commit specific resources then we weren't going to dedicate entire teams to it."

Ocean created some stunning games. It developed *Burnin' Rubber*, the fantastic *RoboCop 2* and the superb *Pang*. But it also ported games directly from the Amstrad CPC including *Operation Thunderbolt*. In some cases, it didn't make any enhancements and people became wary of buying a game on cartridge for £24.99 when it could be bought on tape for less than a tenner. "For us," says Gary, "it wasn't so much about the cost of dedicating teams specifically to the format, but rather the opportunity cost of taking them away from the more established computers."

The reason developers like Ocean, Gremlin and Loricel didn't push the boat out with the GX4000 was simple. Sales were disappointing from the start. It didn't take long to realise that the GX4000 was not as good as the NES or Master System, nor did it represent an essential upgrade from the Spectrum, C64 or CPC. Gamers were buying Amigas and STs, tapping into the 16-bit market and, at the time, piracy was rife. Amstrad may have sold the console to developers on the fact that cartridges were expensive to produce but, faced with spending £24.99 on a game or grabbing some copied Amiga discs in the playground, then, rightly or wrongly, children were likely to do the latter. And where they were prepared to buy expensive games – for example with the NES or SMS – the range of games was far wider. It was clear there was a problem.

Even the in-store GX4000 demonstrators didn't help and the £20 million marketing budget, used to pay for television and magazine advertisements across Europe, failed to have an impact. "We



» This picture, taken by Gauthier Morand, shows the disk-based Plus-enhanced *Space Gun*.



» Best known for his role in *The Apprentice*, Sir Alan Sugar was even more bullish in 1990.

considered producing games for the GX4000," says David Darling, the former owner of budget label Codemasters. "But at that time we could see where the market was and it was lying with Nintendo and Sega. From a financial point of view, it was always going to be more worthwhile trying to produce games for those consoles."

The difference between producing for Nintendo and Sega and making games for Amstrad was one of control. Sugar didn't want to tie developers into exclusivity contracts nor create a licence system. Developers were free to produce whatever they wanted and they had complete freedom. As Codemasters later discovered, Nintendo was – and remains – fiercely protective over who could and couldn't produce games for its consoles.

The biggest problem, however, was the type of games released. There were some gems for the GX4000, but the remainder were fairly run-of-the-mill, the kind people were used to paying less for.

"Perhaps the manufacturing cost and therefore the sale cost of the cartridges were too high," says Roland Perry, Amstrad group technical manager when the GX4000 launched in 1990. "People could buy similar games on floppy disc for the home computer versions. A quick look at the price lists of games back then confirms this. Cartridges were, with the benefit of hindsight, too expensive."

Problems with manufacturing the cartridges didn't help. Shop supplies of games were low so even those who had bought the machine struggled to play anything on it. Rather tellingly, the main magazine, *Amstrad Action*, despite its gushing editorial at the time of launch, had very little coverage in subsequent issues. Few people upgraded from the CPC to the Plus and the magazine's writers decided to concentrate on their core readership.

In February 1991, mere months after launch, Dixons and Comet began to sell the GX4000 for £79 after Amstrad allowed them to keep more of the profits. Still, games were scarce and a few months later there was some structural changes within Amstrad with 37 redundancies including Peter Roback, Amstrad's software and peripherals manager, one of the main men behind the GX4000 launch. The GX4000 was soon being flogged in independent stores for as little as £30. *Amstrad Action* even ran a contest, which asked readers to find the cheapest GX4000 in Britain.

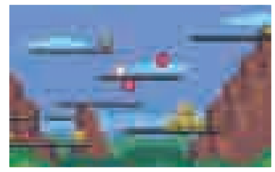
Cliff Lawson, who was part of the team that launched the GX4000, said: "By the time we launched the new machines, there were computers like the Archimedes and ST which were showing what 16-bit CPUs could achieve. And we were still stuck in the 8-bit world. Admittedly, the GX4000 had hardware assistance, but the ST and Archimedes had powerful sound and graphic support chips."

Quite simply, Amstrad had waited too long to take the plunge. By deciding to capitalise on the success of its existing brand and technology, it was trying to nudge its way into the console market on reputation alone. It figured people would buy its consoles out of blind loyalty and familiarity and didn't see that people wanted 16-bit and that rival consoles were offering not only more but also something new. And even if it did offer something new, it didn't have the money to be able to spread the word effectively. While Sega and Nintendo bombarded gamers with cool, eye-catching advertising and word of mouth in the playgrounds spread, Amstrad was being left behind, eventually deciding to cash in its chips. Although it attempted to weld a Sega Mega Drive with a PC in 1992, Amstrad pulled out of the home computer and console market and proved that not everything Sugar touched was sweet.



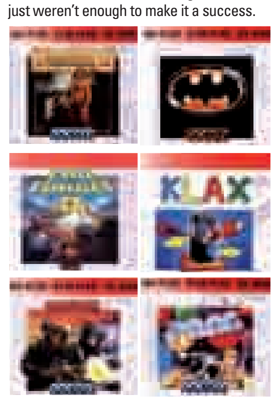
VIVE LA FRANCE

The biggest market for the CPC was France and it is in this country that the Plus range and the GX4000 fared better. One of the most recent games for the Plus, produced in 2005 is the strangely named *Call &BD10'n'oeuf*, an arcade game created by French programmer and musician Fenyx Kell. He presented it at the Amstrad Expo 2005 in Coutances, France. The game is simple – you have to push an egg to the exit – but it makes use of the graphics of the Plus and it looks incredibly lush as a result.









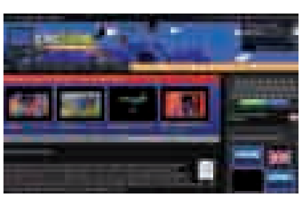
» A selection of the GX4000's games, that just weren't enough to make it a success.

COMMUNITY GX4000 SITES TO WATCH

CPC Zone

www.cpczone.net

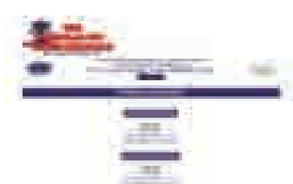
Run by Malc Jennings since 2000, CPC Zone is the top destination for all things GX4000/Plus. It has a host of game reviews thanks to its brilliant Gamebase, the latest news, covers and downloads. But best of all it has the finest CPC forum on the net.



The Amstrad CPC Games Resource

http://tacgr.emuunlim.com

With hundreds of downloads, this is the place to find virtually every single CPC game ever created. There are emulators too, some of them letting you play GX4000 titles.



CPC Wiki

www.cpcwiki.com

The CPC Wiki has lots of information not just on the GX4000 but also the entire CPC range. It's packed with information exploring every nook and cranny of the CPC scene to date, including the movers and shakers, the machines and the many publications.



CPC Game Reviews

www.cpcgamereviews.com

If you're looking to see whether a game is worth playing or compare your experience of a game with somebody else's, then this site is as comprehensive as they come listing hundreds of reviews, all in alphabetical order. It's an impressive collection.



AMSTRAD GX4000

PERFECT TEN GAMES

With around 35 games created for the Amstrad GX4000, picking out ten 'perfect' titles should be a difficult task. In actual fact, though, it isn't. For while there were many straightforward lazy ports of CPC games, there were also some spectacular originals.



01



02

PRO TENNIS TOUR

- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** UBISOFT
- » **CREATED BY:** BLUE BYTE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** THE SETTLERS

01 **Fast, smooth and** with realistic looking players, technically this was the best tennis game produced for the Amstrad… full stop. That it was available on the GX4000 gave people a reason to buy the console, especially as Ubisoft enhanced the graphics and tweaked the gameplay so that, while not totally realistic, the way that you hit the ball had an effect on where it ended up. And that, looking back, was something of a bonus. There was a slickness to *Pro Tennis Tour* that makes it playable today. Although it is possible to hit a ball that has seemingly flown past you, the incredible attention to detail and the range of tournaments available, from Wimbledon to the French, Australian and US Opens, made it a welcome GX4000 addition.

ROBOCOP 2

- » **RELEASED:** 1991
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** OCEAN
- » **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** TOTAL RECALL

02 **Time hasn't been** particularly kind to *RoboCop 2*, the obstacles that are strewn before our hulking metal-clad, law-enforcing hero proving more frustrating than challenging when romped through today. Back in its Amstrad GX4000 day, however, this cartridge-only release was the console's shining light and, to be honest, there is more than enough in this platform game to make it well worth a full playthrough again, if only to experience the smooth scrolling, the great use of the hardware sprites and a beautiful blend of eye candy colours, all carefully drawn to make the screen ooze atmosphere. Can this compare to a 16-bit release? The answer would, graphically at least, have to be a positive.

BATMAN: THE MOVIE

- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** OCEAN
- » **CREATED BY:** OCEAN/MIKE LAMB
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** RENEGADE

03 **When you play** the first level of this Ocean licence – the third *Batman* game released by Ocean – you are instantly sucked in. Few can resist playing as the Caped Crusader, especially in a game based on the gloomy, yet cool, 1989 classic movie. Also, being inside a factory and aiming weapons at wave after wave of baddies in an iconic and most memorable first level was, 18 years ago, almost worth the £25 price tag alone. It didn't add anything new to the bog-standard CPC version, though, and the side-scrolling Batmobile level, the third/puzzle level and the change to fly the Batwing were ultimately disappointing.

BURNIN' RUBBER

- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** OCEAN
- » **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** CHASE HQ

04 **Bundled with the** GX4000, this was the game that got hearts racing and it was the first title that most, if not all, of the console's gamers played. In a lot of cases, it was also the last due to the lack of GX4000 games available, but its impressive graphics and the brilliant crash scenes showed the capability of Amstrad's offering and placed it in pole position when it came to finding the best 8-bit racing game of all time, in terms of visuals anyway. As long as you had the stamina to keep going without running out of time, you'd be awarded with engaging fun, the joy of seeing the sky change from day to night and some amazing crashes.

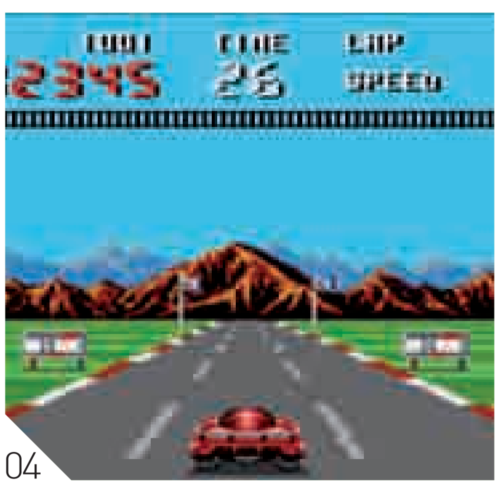
PANG

- » **RELEASED:** 1991
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** OCEAN
- » **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** PLOTTING

05 **There were, to** excuse the pun, pangs of jealously when this game was released as a cartridge-only GX4000/Plus game, mainly because it was a title that most CPC gamers wanted. The desire was so strong that indy developer Elmsoft – aka Elmar Krieger – produced his own version, *Zap T Balls* that, while not as good, at least gave CPCers something to get their teeth into. Popping balloons, seeing them split into two and trying to eradicate the lot was so much fun and it was made even better for the fact that the GX4000 enhanced it with graphics that took that jealousy to a whole new level.



03

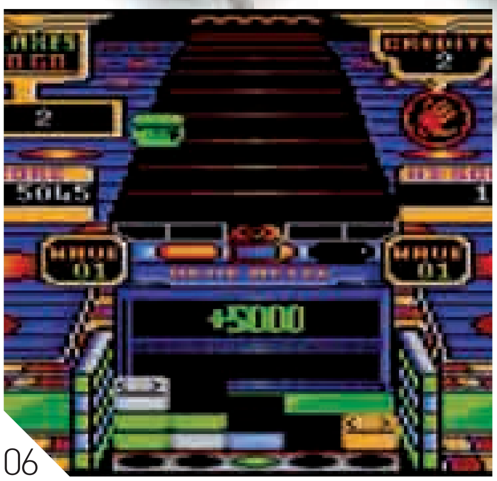


04



05

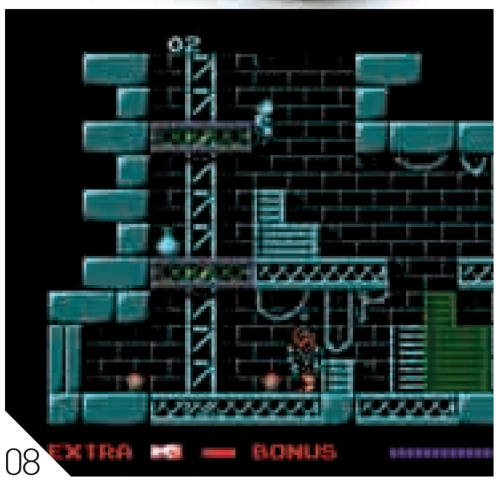




06



07



08

KLAX

» **RELEASED:** 1991
» **PUBLISHED BY:** DOMARK
» **CREATED BY:** ATARI GAMES
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** GAUNTLET

06 One of the most ported falling-tiles games in history is – putting *Tetris* to one side – none other than *Klax*. And on the GX4000, a console that only had Ocean's *Plotting* as a rival, it was a must-have purchase. Having said that, it didn't come without some disappointment since it was identical to the standard game released on the CPC and it made very little use of the extra capability (much like *Plotting*). If *Klax* wasn't such a legendary, addictive game, it wouldn't actually warrant being in this Perfect Ten because of this lack of ambition. But there were so few games on the GX4000 that, if you take the game at face value, it's worthy of an inclusion.

NAVY SEALS

» **RELEASED:** 1991
» **PUBLISHED BY:** OCEAN
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** ROBOCOP

07 With graphics as astounding as *RoboCop 2*'s, *Navy Seals* showed more than a hint of the capability of the GX4000. As a cartridge-only release, it made use of the console's extra features, boasting smooth scrolling and excellent animation. But the game was as hard as one of the five heroes you played, mainly because it wasn't a case of storming into the terrorists' HQ with all guns blazing. Instead, you had to take a more measured, stealthy approach as befitting a member of the prestigious Navy Seals. It's a shame the title was so difficult as it put many off venturing past the first level. With perseverance came great reward, however.

SWITCHBLADE

» **RELEASED:** 1991
» **PUBLISHED BY:** GREMLIN GRAPHICS
» **CREATED BY:** GREMLIN/JEFF CALDER
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** STRYKER IN THE CRYPTS OF TROGAN

08 Gremlin Graphics excelled itself with this platformer that some may argue was the best game on the console. It used the machine's Mode 1 – a 320 by 200 resolution. Whereas the old CPCs were constrained to just four colours in that mode, (as opposed to the 16 that could be used in the lower-res Mode 0), the GX4000 could handle more. And so when you put the original CPC version next to the cartridge one, you can see the difference with extra colour and elegance. While that is the only real difference between the versions, it nevertheless showed that, had the GX4000 been successful, it was possible to push otherwise unheard of CPC boundaries.


09

SKEET SHOOT

» **RELEASED:** 1991
» **PUBLISHED BY:** TROJAN
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** ENFORCER

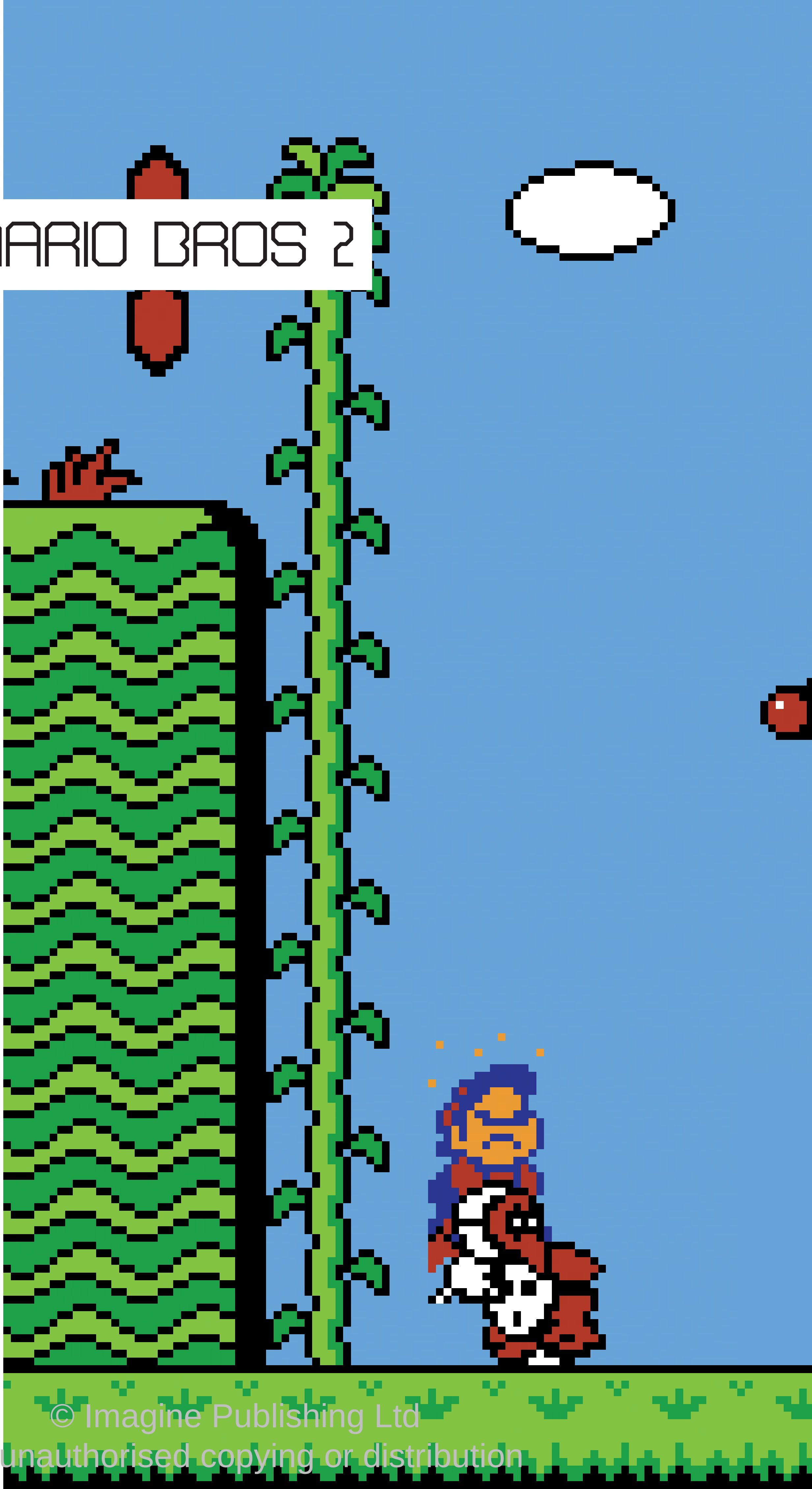
09 Using the Amstrad GX4000's lightgun – and yes, there was one actually available for the princely sum of £30 – you could play *Skeet Shoot* (and pick up *Enforcer* later, had you some spare cash knocking around). Predictably, *Skeet Shoot* was a bloodless shooter in which you had to blast clay pigeons out of the sky. The geese that flew around the screen oozed liquid when they were hit, but that was about as gruesome as the game ever got. *Skeet Shoot* is one of the rarer games, mainly because to pick one up today you would have to find the lightgun that didn't sell all that well either. It's not a particularly wonderful game via an emulator (and neither, if you're asking, is the *Untouchables*-esque *Enforcer*).

FIRE & FORGET II

» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **PUBLISHED BY:** TITUS
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** CRAZY CARS

10 This sequel to *Fire & Forget*, a game that was released two years earlier, had three aims: kill, kill and… er… kill, basically. And as you scoot through the game's five levels in your Thunder Master II, you will be busting more terrorist butt than you could ever possibly imagine, firing missile after missile and taking to the air. The road is long – at times a little bit too long – and it can soon get rather tiring and somewhat repetitive, but driving you on is a deep down desire to keep taking pot shots at the enemy and it's certainly different to a regular run-of-the-mill shoot-'em-up. With much excellent, if spartan, graphical elegance to feast your peepers on, *Fire & Forget II* is certainly one worth taking a run out with.


10



SUPER MARIO BROS 2

THE PLUMBER OF PERSIA



- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **RELEASED:** 1989
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORM
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** NES
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+



HISTORY

***Yume Kojo: Doki Doki Panic* is the Arabian original of the *Super Mario Bros* sequel. After Nintendo released this standalone platform game in Japan, it was worried the game would prove just too taxing for us Westerners and we would grow to hate it for it. As a result, it came up with the brilliantly cheapskate idea of toning down the difficulty a shade, switching the characters for ones more commonly found milling around in Mushroom Kingdom, and calling it *Super Mario Bros 2*.**

Now to the previously uninformed this will explain a lot. This explains the strange difference in gameplay, the somewhat stretched look of all the characters, the Egyptian feeling levels, the brothers' sudden inability to stomp-kill their enemies and all that peculiar vegetable pulling. But apart from dull box art – Mario holding a turnip – and it being built from the lovelorn ashes of another game, it's always puzzled me as to why so many Mario-fans look down their noses at it.

Super Mario Bros 2 marks the first and only time (not including *Super Smash Bros*) that Princess Peach isn't locked away in a castle, the first time Mario and Luigi actually work as a team – giving you the option to change between four characters between each stage – and the first time Nintendo would make Mario the fat one. It's also brilliantly playable too, feels more layered than the original, looks great and introduces many elements and enemies that would become mainstays for the series. There are the warp stalks, doorways, the backwards and vertical scrolling, and the gameplay itself which actually shares a lot of similarities with *Super Mario World*.

So it has to be said, the vitriol that's always been projected at it (I've always felt) was just a little unjust. It's no *Mario 3* beater but on the other hand it's no *turbo Out Run* or *Final Fight 2* either. Sure, this is a different kind of Mario adventure, but that doesn't make it a bad game.



THE CLASSIC GAME

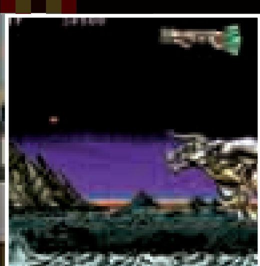
天聖龍

SAINT DRAGON

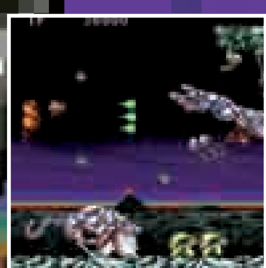


Once the preserve of bearded dice rollers, dragons went mainstream during the Eighties, leaving behind their caves to travel to distant worlds. From *Dragon's Lair* through to *Blue Dragon*, they have been slaughtered in their thousands for their experience points and magical potions. There was a time when a solitary knight was all a dragon had to cope with, by the end of the Eighties, however, they were being slaughtered en masse everywhere from space to pin tables, and the biggest culprits? Man, of course. Will we ever learn?

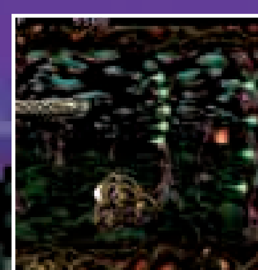
Saint Dragon takes place as the world is being devoured by a man-made cyborg horde, race by race these beasts have enslaved the universe. Our hero Saint Dragon goes along with it until they start to conquer his world The Planet Of The Golden Dragon. Prepare for the toughest shooter since *R-Type*.



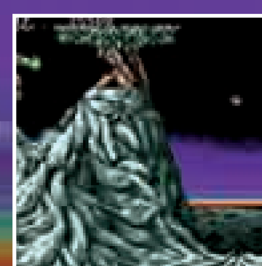
Saint Dragon
A war machine that's been honed from the best technology man has to offer and fused with the power and grace of a dragon. A touch of conscience turns our villain into a hero.



Mech cats
Panthers and steel come together to make an imposing guardianship of the first level. Taking more fire power to destroy than the standard vessels, their bounding attacks are never less than unsettling.



Spores
As Level 2 progresses, the dragon is attacked by spores that appear from the bottom of the screen, then the top. Difficult to destroy, harder to avoid, they take the game to a new level of difficulty.



Cyborg Century
These rocket-firing cyborg eagles block any narrow areas, unleashing rockets that fly faster than Saint Dragon can move. They absorb a lot of fire before going down, and distract you into instant death.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

WHY IS IT A CLASSIC?



It's a blaster to rival R-Type

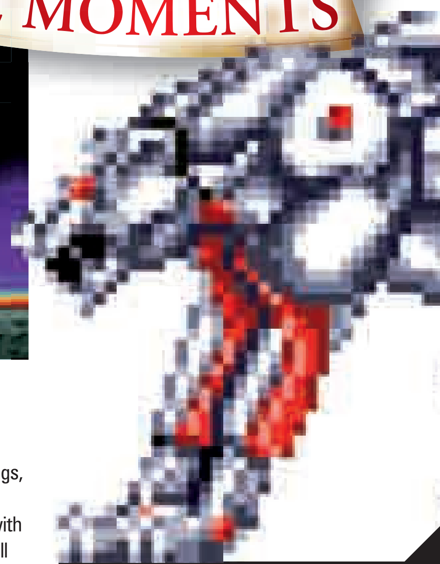
On the face of it *Saint Dragon* doesn't look like a classic, despite coming later it isn't an aesthetic equal to *R-Type*. The thing that makes it a classic though is the immersion and empathy you feel with the dragon. The odds are overwhelming, and as the player winds and unwinds the dragon to shield its one weak spot, there is a real sense of controlling a creature not a craft. The bosses all nod towards the history of shoot-'em-ups, you don't have to look hard to see *Gradius* and *R-Type* in the game. It's difficult too, largely down to the pace of the game, it hurtles along even by today's standards and requires concentration in bucket loads.

BEST CHARACTER



Saint Dragon

Saint Dragon is one of the fiercest-looking creatures in videogames. Its gaze menaces and is fixed errantly forwards, its tail swings and undulates above and below its head. Forwards and backwards it swings, offering protection from the high-speed missiles that make up most of the game. While immune from attacks, any contact from the dragon with one of the myriad creatures that have invaded his home world will spell certain doom. As power-ups are collected the dragon morphs into an impressive sight, spewing fire and lasers around the screen. Seldom has a character been such a joy to control, Saint Dragon is an intuitive BFG.



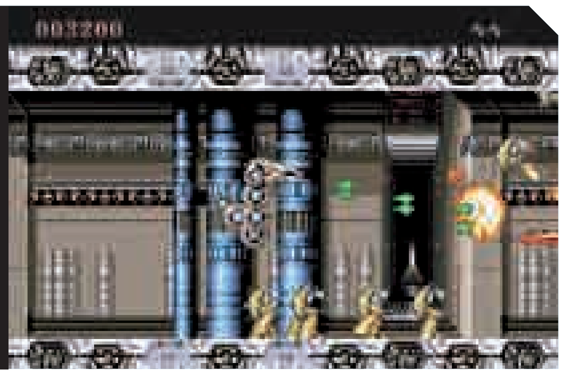
BEST BOSS



Arch Forrell

The first boss is the best. First, the head appears as you navigate a sequence at the end of Level 1, then the full shape falls into view as you leave the landscape behind. Covering much of the game area, Arch Forrell is heavily armed and armoured. It also doesn't follow a preset boss pattern, spewing missiles and rockets the screen soon becomes awash with instant death, and while the player dodges around the screen, the behemoth moves in for the kill. Continuous hits will see the beast's head and armour fall away, however, this just removes the safety catch on his weapons, as waves of laser fire emit from his innards.

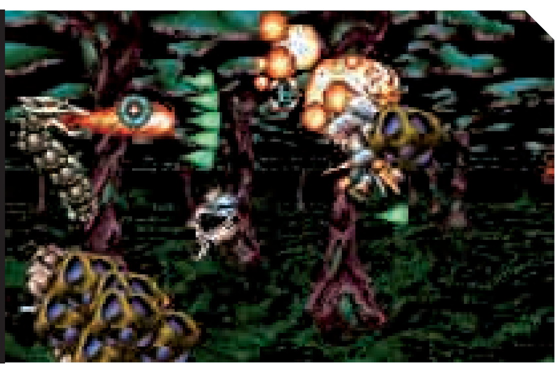
BEST CONVERSION



Amiga 500

Many gamers will remember *Saint Dragon* very differently to the game described here. All the home versions delivered a homage, not a straight conversion of the arcade game. The 8-bit systems had a strong but sparse game, fewer enemies and backdrops replaced by bad relief styling. The Amiga and ST fared better, but failed to match the speed of the original, and as the screen was stretched the dragon had more room to move around. The arcade gave a feeling of being cramped, hemmed in, and used one of the narrowest game fields of any side-scrolling shoot-'em-up. If we had to choose one though we'll plump for the Amiga version.

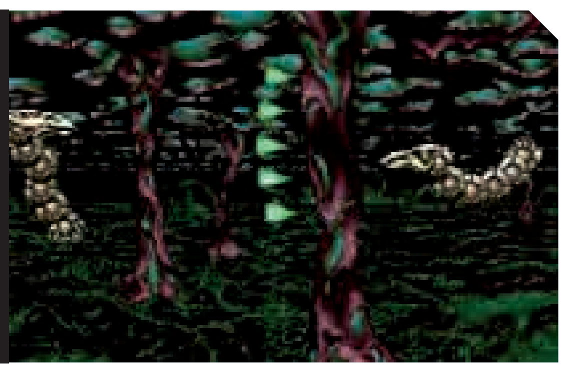
BEST STAGE



Stage 2: Dark Subterranean Cave

After the lush forests of Level 1, the game progresses into a more arid land, the greenery sparser. Gone are the rocky outcrops, instead replaced by armadas of enemies and the feeling permeates that the dragon is moving into the thick of something. As the enemy count rises significantly, the player is introduced to new protagonists, different beasts coexist, unified in their desire to destroy the dragon, this creates a nice paradox. While the feeling of pace is still there, dragon flight is now more determined, culminating in a simple boss fight – the second level illustrates everything that *Saint Dragon* is to become.

STANDOUT MOMENT



Another Saint Dragon

Halfway through the second level another dragon will appear, equally powerful and adept it's the shock that you feel as a player when it first appears. Jaleco never hints at it, but there is a real sense within the game that Saint Dragon is the last dragon around, so to meet an equal that is a party to the desecration of The Planet Of The Golden Dragon is a little disturbing, with its equal fire power and movement proving particularly challenging initially. Once dispatched, however, and with other dragons appearing regularly from now on, it is once again apparent that you will be the last dragon.

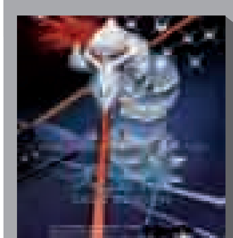
What the mags said… ages ago

ACE

As you may have gathered, *Saint Dragon* doesn't offer anything new. However, as a straightforward blaster, it's one of the most playable in its field. Even though it has only five levels, each is long and tough enough to tax even the most experienced player. It'll never be regarded as a classic game.

What we think

Ace got it right in most respects, but *Saint Dragon* is a classic. To play it today is like revisiting the best shooters that came before it – *R-Type*, *Nemesis* and *Scramble* to name a few. *Saint Dragon* is a synapse of its time, with a CD soundtrack released in 1989, it's an experience that should be enjoyed by everyone, just once or twice though.



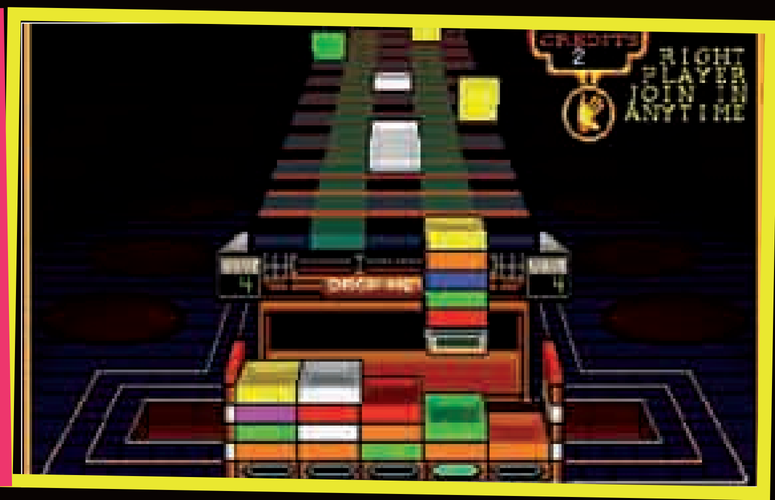
IN THE KNOW

- **DEVELOPER:** AICOM
- **PUBLISHER:** JALECO
- **RELEASED:** 1989
- **GENRE:** SIDE-SCROLLING SHOOTER
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £300+ (ARCADE CABINET)
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD, C64, AMIGA, ATARI ST, MSX AND TURBOGRAFX

THE MAKING OF...

KLAX





Ever dreamed of waves of tiles relentlessly marching towards you, screaming as they plummet from the edge of a conveyor belt? If so, either you've been playing too much Klax or you need to see a doctor. Craig Grannell talks to Mark Stephen Pierce about his enduring puzzler, which crosses Tetris with Connect 4

IN THE KNOW



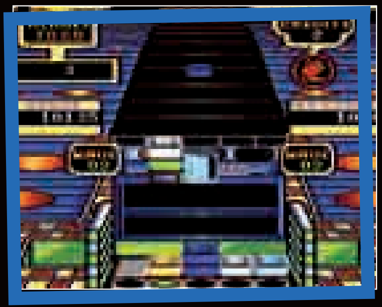
- » **PUBLISHER:** ATARI GAMES
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **RELEASED:** 1989
- » **PLATFORM:** ARCADE (LATER CONVERTED TO PRACTICALLY EVERY HOME PLATFORM)
- » **GENRE:** ACTION-PUZZLER
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £250+ FOR AN ARCADE CABINET, 50P+ FOR THE HOME CONVERSIONS

Towards the end of the summer in 1989, Hide Nakajima, the then-president of Atari Games, decided he wanted a puzzle game for the ATEI (Amusement Trades Exhibition International) show in London. The catch: the ATEI was four months away. "I raised my hand," says Mark Stephen Pierce, who by that time was a few years into his 14-year stint at Atari, which he initially joined as an animator and designer to work on *SuperVette* (later renamed *RoadBlasters*). And so began the story of one of the most enduring action-puzzlers of the Nineties, which, while never surpassing the game that inspired it – Alexey Pajitnov's *Tetris* – nonetheless managed to lodge itself in the collective consciousness of gamers and find its way on to myriad platforms.

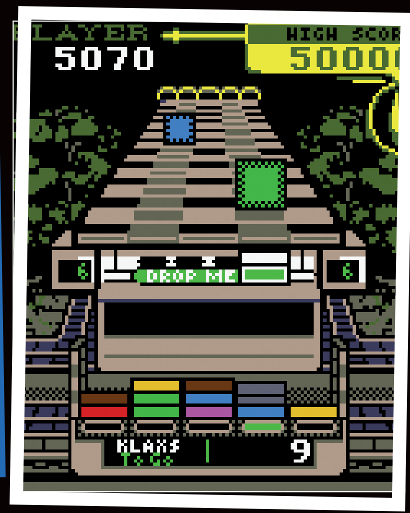
With Hide's request arising because of the staggering popularity of *Tetris*, it would have been easy to rush out a borderline clone, rather like Sega had done with the derivative *Columns*. "But I went back to my cube in the lab and spent some time over the next few days drawing shapes that looked like they might be in puzzle games," says Mark. "Rather than blatantly copying *Tetris*, I tried to come up with a mechanic that was different."

In the broadest sense, *Klax*'s underlying concept remains similar to that of *Tetris*. The basic premise is to create order out of disorder. However, the way this is done is distinct from Pajitnov's classic, despite some superficial similarities. The game presents you with a five-column conveyor belt, along which different-coloured tiles 'march' ominously towards you. You catch tiles on a paddle before they plummet over the edge (referred to as a 'drop'), and dump them one by one into a five-by-five well.

Blocks are eliminated by matching three in a line – a 'Klax' – and a certain number of Klaxes are required to progress to the next level (although later







» [Arcade] The level is completed in the nick of time, and the rampaging tiles are frozen in their tracks. Take that, square things!

> "THROUGHOUT, WE WATCHED PEOPLE PLAY, LEARNED WHAT WORKED AND TOOK IT FROM THERE. IT WAS ONE OF THE MOST PRODUCTIVE AND FREE-FLOWING FEW MONTHS OF DEVELOPMENT I'VE EVER HAD"

levels also require specific challenges to be met). You have a limited number of 'drops' and should you go over this limit, it's game over. But to help you in your task, you can hold up to five tiles on your paddle at any one time (which adds an extra layer of strategy to the game), along with flinging the uppermost block back halfway along the conveyor belt.

The inspiration for Mark's idea actually arrived from outside of gaming, as he explains: "It came from the genesis of an idea and animation I made while developing MacroMind VideoWorks, the predecessor to PC and Macintosh multimedia authoring environment Macromedia Director. The game was loosely based on a sketch from a television show where the character had to deal with a conveyor belt in a bakery, correctly adding various things to baked goods!"

Although Mark notes that the condensed development time meant decisions had to be made quickly and that they therefore weren't always entirely considered, the various gameplay components weren't decided on at random. After playing around with shapes for a few days, Mark realised that with an odd number of columns and stacks, it's possible to make vertical, diagonal and horizontal 'completions', hence settling on five columns and a five-by-five well. Also, unlike *Tetris* and *Columns* with their solitary single falling piece, *Klax* not only increases in speed as you progress through the game, but also the number of tiles simultaneously in play escalates – a gameplay component Mark refers to as "the pressure of a relentless rain of death in the form of something coming from above that must be dealt with".

Once Mark had settled on these basic ideas, putting things together from a programming standpoint fell to the talented Dave Akers, the engineer Mark had worked with on *Escape From The Planet Of The Robot Monsters*. A crude mock-up was pieced together over a weekend on an Amiga, played with and dissected, and the mechanic was judged very plausible. From there, it was a case of moving *Klax* from the Amiga to an arcade board and expanding it, ensuring players would have something new to discover should they stick with the game for any length of time.

Unlike with most puzzle games, graphics became a consideration. Most previous entries in the genre had been relatively barren from a visual standpoint, but to hold a gamer's attention in the late-Eighties, there needed to be at least a splash of aesthetic goodness. Therefore, the game's background occasionally changes, offering some new visual interest. "I drew all the graphics, using a tool I developed at Atari called RAD," explains Mark. "When I got to Atari in 1986, they were using these big drawing tablets hooked up to VAX computers. Since I was used to the Mac and VideoWorks, and since it was the dawn of the PC graphics card, one of my jobs at Atari was to develop a PC-based paint tool."

A HANDY DESIGN

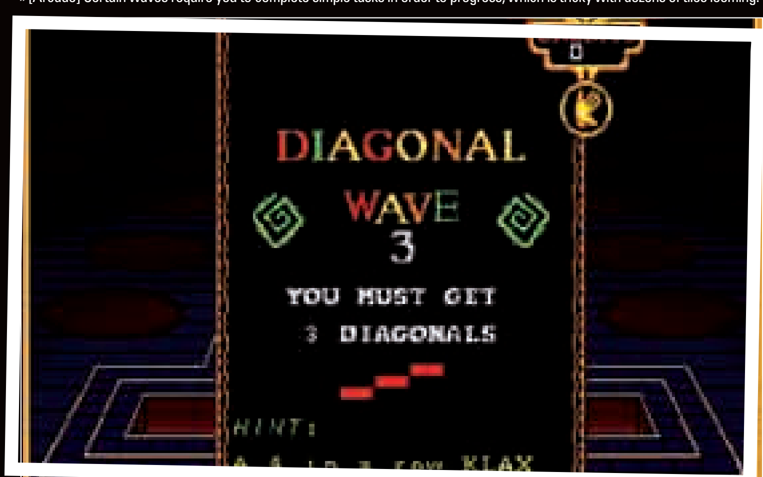


Mark recalls that the very short time the team had to create *Klax* was liberating: there was rarely time to reconsider ideas, and so plenty of elements within the game were thought of on a whim, and they just went with them. A case in point is the iconic hand, seen on the game's title screen. "I remember coming up with that symbol while I was stuck in traffic on Highway 101," says Mark. "I went to work that day and made a quick title screen. Dave popped it in, and liked it."

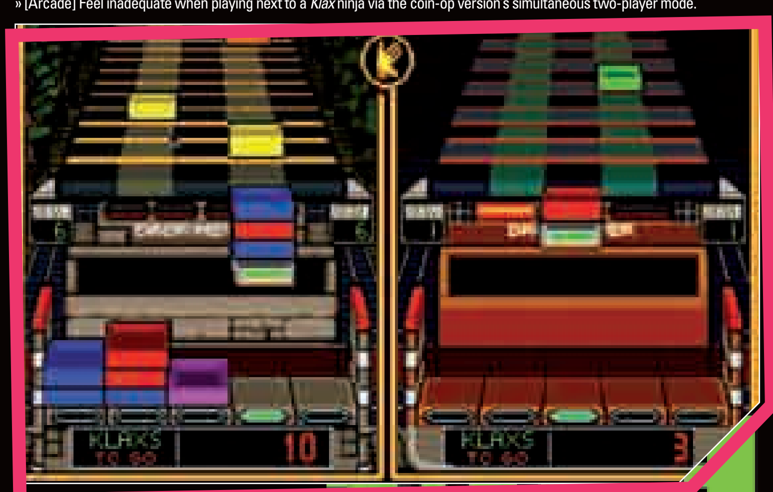
Four months later and hundreds of machines were on the production line, with Mark's spontaneously designed hand icon conspicuous on the decals. "Once they started shipping, I remember seeing trucks loaded with 40 units each," remembers Mark. "I had a chuckle about how an idea I had in my head 150 days previously was now slowing down to go over a speed bump in a truck on its way to the four corners of the Earth!"



» [Arcade] Certain waves require you to complete simple tasks in order to progress, which is tricky with dozens of tiles looming.



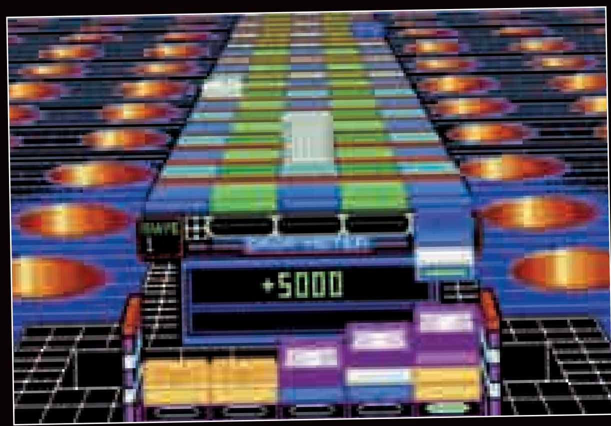
» [Arcade] Feel inadequate when playing next to a *Klax* ninja via the coin-op version's simultaneous two-player mode.

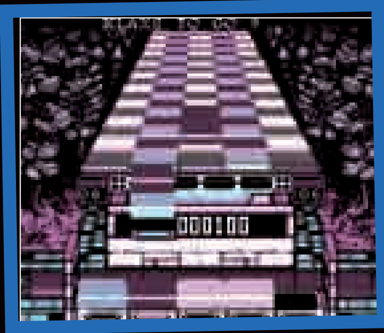


CONVERSION CAPERS

Although not quite following the likes of *Choplifter*, *Pitfall* and *Boulder Dash*, in starting on home systems and being converted for the arcades, *Klax* actually started life on the Amiga, which programmer Dave Akers used for the original demo. The game was then ported from Amiga Basic to C, and a prototype developed on an *Escape From The Planet Of The Robot Monsters* board.

The success of *Klax* in the arcades meant home conversions were inevitable. "In those days, if an arcade game was a hit, it was a clear guarantee that the home game – no matter how horrid the system – would do well. *Klax* did well in the arcade, so it did well in the home," explains Mark. And because of the game's Amiga roots and relatively simple nature, the conversions were mostly a success. "Dave and I did the Genesis version right after we finished the arcade, and it sold well," adds Mark.





Although never quite meeting his goal of re-creating what he'd done at MacroMind with video, the resulting tool nonetheless offered the features required for him to create Klax's imagery. Of all of the aspects of the game, it's the graphics Mark is least happy with. "Given the chance to go back, I could do a better job on the graphics," he says. "But then what I did was down to the limited time we had, and perhaps also the capabilities of the hardware."

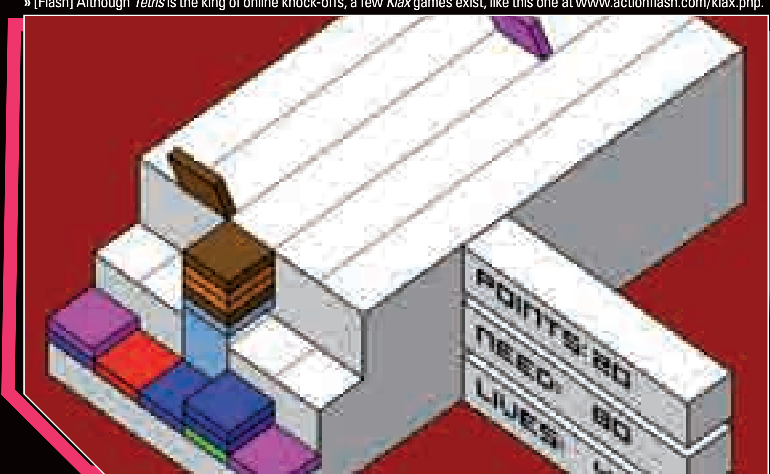
Audio was, for Mark, more successful, and the game is peppered with sound effects and speech. Usefully, each tile makes its own movement noise, enabling seasoned players to pick out what colour tile has most recently joined the conveyor belt, without having to look. More bizarre are the screams of dropped tiles and the ripple of applause upon completing a round. "Like everything in *Klax*, the audio was very impulsive," admits Mark. "I had a vision of a crowd watching, like at a golf tournament, and so we grabbed some people from the office and recorded gentle clapping and 'aaaahhhhh' noises." And the scream? "The scream is me!"

As alluded to earlier, gameplay elements also ensure *Klax* offers a sense of progression. Rather than the game just getting faster, goals are sometimes added to the mix, tasking the player with creating diagonal, vertical or horizontal Klaxes. "The tile order is table-driven, with one-hundred waves, and I tuned each wave with a table of arguments that Dave and I devised that could set the colour mix, speed, and so on," reveals Mark. With people hooked on the basic challenge from day one, there was always an audience to test on, and Atari had a statistics package for measuring playtime, difficulty and session lengths, ensuring the game was suitable for mere mortals.

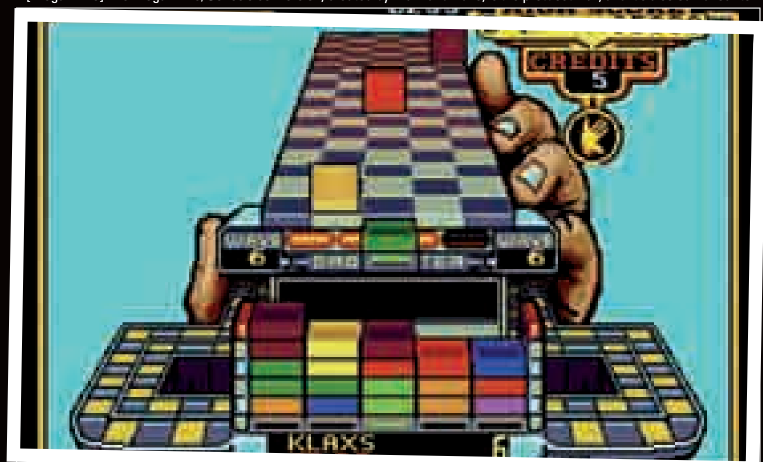
Perhaps surprisingly, given the game's rapid turnaround, and the fact both hardware and software needed to be developed within four months, Mark remembers *Klax*'s gestation being smooth. "Everything just seemed to flow," he says. "Throughout, we watched people play, learned what worked and took it from there. It was one of the most productive and free-flowing few months of development I've ever had."

There are no pop-group-style tales of bust-ups and falling-outs either. Mark still talks fondly of his working relationship with Dave Akers, adding that they worked closely on three titles altogether. "He was shy, but totally reliable and we got on great," remembers Mark. "I was always driven, and he was happy and gracious enough

"OUT OF ALL THE GAMES I'VE WORKED ON, KLAX HAS ALWAYS BEEN ONE OF MY FAVOURITES, BECAUSE IT'S A PURE VIDEOGAME. IT WAS AS CLOSE TO PERFECTION AS I'VE EVER COME IN VIDEOGAMES"



» [Flash] Although *Tetris* is the king of online knock-offs, a few *Klax* games exist, like this one at www.actionflash.com/klax.php.



» [Mega Drive] The Mega Drive/Genesis conversion, created by Mark and Dave, is the prettiest *Klax*, and it's also our favourite.



» [Atari 7800] The Atari 7800 version shows how it should be done to the trio of 8-bit computers loved by the Brits.



» [Atari 2600] Despite its lack of power, the 2600 version plays very well, proving how *Klax* can work on the simplest of devices.

to have me dictate what we did every day." Mark recalls a big whiteboard in the lab on which he'd list daily priorities and how Dave would methodically work his way down the list: "I'd ask him to estimate each task and we'd see how he did. This would then go into the mix for the next day and became a bit of a game in itself!"

Despite the initial requirement being extremely tough, the team hit its deadline, and *Klax* was summarily showcased at the ATEI. The critical and commercial responses were both favourable: plenty of units were sold, and the game was considered a hit; and because the game was so simple, it was converted to practically every system around at the time. Also, due to Klax's timeless nature, it's become a favourite for re-creating on modern consoles, most recently as part of the slightly duff Game Boy Advance *Marble Madness/Klax* double-pack, and as one of the better offerings in the popular *Midway Arcade Treasures*.

Even with the benefit of hindsight, Mark reckons there's very little he would change about *Klax*. He reminds us that, perhaps against the odds, the team managed to create from scratch a hit arcade game in just four months, and he still considers it a good design. "The hook is a really simple one that gets people all of the time: make order out of disorder," says Mark. "Out of all the games I've worked on, *Klax* has always been one of my favourites, because it's a pure videogame. By that, I mean that the game and concept can only exist in the videogame world. There is no narrative and there are no characters – only action and reaction. With people playing *Klax* in the lab from day one, it was as close to perfection I have ever come in videogames."

Although Mark no longer works in the (now rapidly deteriorating) arcade industry, the experience of creating fun, engaging games that immediately grab the attention has stayed with him. He now heads Super Happy Fun Fun (www.superhappyfunfun.com), a company founded in 2001 that concentrates on creating output now referred to as 'casual games', akin to the arcade games of old. And, as per his work with Atari, Mark continues to carefully balance classic gameplay with innovation: upcoming titles include games with motion and gesture control, and the recently released *Return To Dark Castle*, a major update to the well-regarded Mac Classic game *Dark Castle* (with a PC version due later this year).

Despite the ongoing success of Super Happy Fun Fun, you still suspect on talking to Mark that if he could take a sneaky trip back in time to his halcyon arcade-game days, he would jump at the chance. "Everything was a joy," he says. "And I've come to realise that Atari Games was one of the best environments I had the very good fortune to be a part of." One particularly fond memory for Mark involves him being on the showfloor at the ATEI at Earls Court, with a huge bank of monitors proudly displaying *Klax*, and Depeche Mode's *Just Can't Get Enough* blaring out of a huge set of speakers. "It was cool knowing we'd all worked together and accomplished something we set out to do," concludes Mark. "Playing the game we had just made along with the music blaring out on a show floor in London was f**king cool!"

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DARK CASTLE
SYSTEM: APPLE MAC
YEAR: 1986

RETURN TO DARK CASTLE
SYSTEM: APPLE MAC
YEAR: 2008

ROADBLASTERS (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1987



» [Lynx] Cunningly taking advantage of the Lynx's ability to work when rotated 90 degrees, the conversion for Atari's handheld is the best portable *Klax*.



» [Mega Drive] Unlike most home ports, Sega's consoles had extras, such as different tile palettes.



PUZZLE GAMES GALLERY



Super Puzzle Fighter II Year Released: 1996



Klax Year Released: 1989



Cleopatra Fortune Year Released: 1986



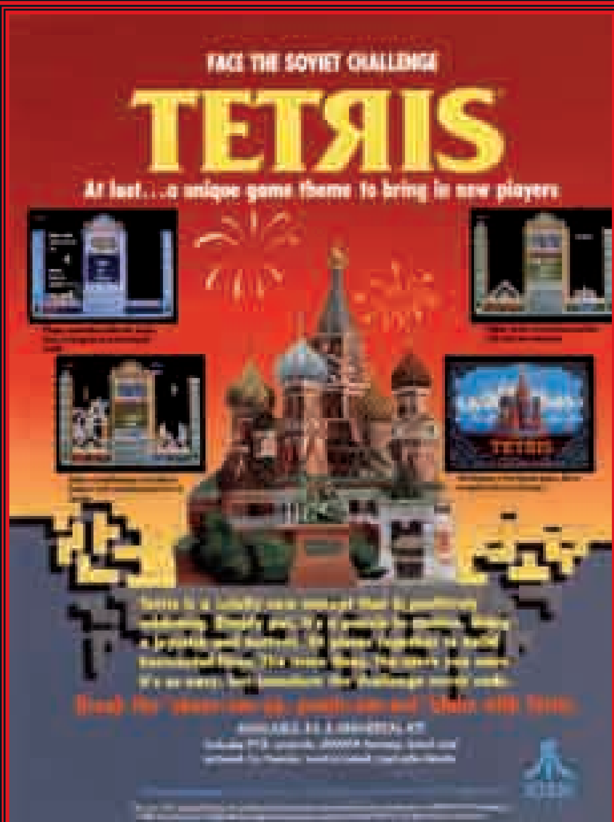
Mr Driller Year Released: 1999



Columns Year Released: 1990



Puchi Caret Year Released: 1987



Tetris Year Released: 1988



Baku Baku Animal Year Released: 1995

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RETRO SHAMER

SHAQ-FU

LAST ISSUE WE LOOKED AT THE PIT OF ALL FIGHTING GAMES, PIT-FIGHTER. THIS ISSUE WE'RE LOOKING AT THE SHAQ OF ALL FIGHTING GAMES, SHAQ-FU, WHICH IS THE 'SHAQ OF ALL' BY DEFAULT BECAUSE IT'S THE ONLY FIGHTING GAME TO HAVE A SHAQ IN IT… THANKFULLY. STUART HUNT PLAYS HORSE WITH SHAQ AND INVITES YOU TO WATCH HIM SQUIRM

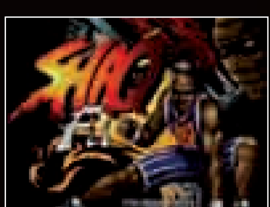


» This green-sheet wearing guy performed this lame move for about five seconds.



» This game does serious damage to your brain cells. Trust us, Stuart's incapable of writing any decent captions now.

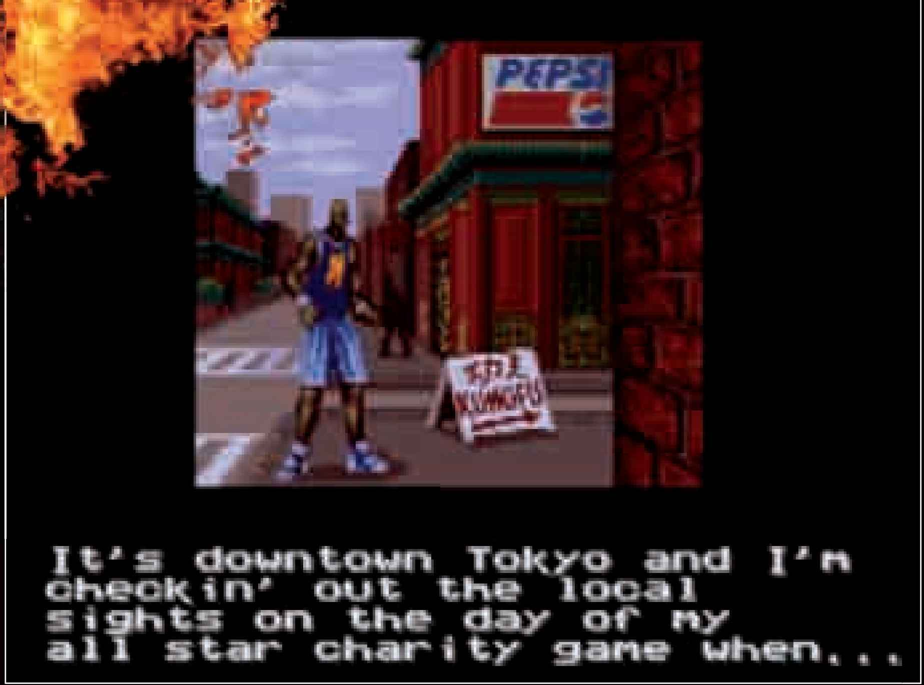
IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- » **DEVELOPER:** DELPHINE SOFTWARE INTERNATIONAL
- » **RELEASED:** 1994
- » **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** WAY TOO MUCH
- » **WHY PLAY THIS WHEN YOU CAN PLAY:** GAROU: MARK OF THE WOLVES







» Kung fu and Pepsi – apparently the way to Shaq's heart.

POINTLESS PART

The map section is ridiculous. A tiny pixel of Shaquille runs around a plan view of Thorpe Park stopping off to fight some jerks. Is Delphine trying to suggest that *Shaq-Fu* would make a horrible RPG, or is it trying to disguise its own lack of quality by giving the impression that it's better than most beat-'em-ups because instead of automatically pitting you against a group of fighters, it makes you walk to them?



From Ghostface to Kasparov, Electronic Arts has never been a stranger to pulling hackneyed celebrities off the street and signing them up to appear in big-budget videogames. But did you know that pro-basketball player Shaquille O'Neal was the founder of a lethal martial art known as 'Shaqido'? Nope, neither did we. Apparently, between 'Shaq-attaqing' at charity basketball matches, he finds time to travel to fantastical worlds to save Japanese kids because a shop owner tells him to. Sure, the premise is ridiculous, but in all fairness it's completely forgivable given the context. How, exactly, do you entwine a plot about a basketball player fighting a mummy and a woman with a tail? Well, the long and short of it is you don't, you leave well alone.

There isn't a single aspect of *Shaq-Fu* that works, not one. If you've never played the game, count yourself extremely blessed. This is a title that one SNES owner famously likened to 'licking off a tramp's face', while another commented that it 'played out like a realistic night terror where the maker of *Flashback* made a fighting game starring Shaquille O'Neal.'

The dire side story is completely unnecessary. Of course, almost every fighting game in existence has some flimsy plot about a lame tournament that pits people in various Halloween costumes against each other in a fight to the death. Where *Shaq-Fu* really falls down, however, is in its infuriating controls, broken collision detection, and strange diminutive fighters made up of banal characters who fall under the most clichéd stereotypes imaginable. Cat women, a mummy, a red thing that looks like a cheap tyrant from *Resident Evil*, Aladdin, an Amazon, and a zombie wearing a dust sheet to name a few.

You should also be aware that the game features the weakest special moves we've ever seen in a videogame. Shaq has a flaming punch and a flaming kick, both of which use the exact same lazy flaming sprite graphic – and pulling these moves off just isn't worth the bother. You'll continually go back to standard attacks because while pulling of a Shaq-uriken is one thing, pulling off a Shaq-uriken and making it connect with something is another thing altogether.

Shaq-Fu's tiresome combatants almost look lost trading blows in the middle of the screen. There's a real sense that the team that drew them were either long-sighted or somewhat confused as to whether *Shaq-Fu* was a beat-'em-up or a fighting game, which, frankly, is an easy mistake to make. Adding to its confused appearance is the most broken collision detection we've ever had the misfortune of experiencing. Rather than splitting each fighter up into individual invisible 'collision squares' like most 'regular' beat-'em-ups, in *Shaq-Fu* you have to strike the centre of a fighter's sprite. This means that 80% of the moves performed by the player are usually a complete waste of time, and most bouts tend to end by way of a time-out.

What we do like, however, is the appalling way that the game attempts to add a sense of choice into the action. The first three fights can be fought in any order by moving the tiniest sprite in the world around a cartoon game map. This is utterly pointless because you have to fight the same three characters to progress anyway and then the game tires of the whole 'freedom of selection' idea and forces the player to complete the next few fights in a given order.

If you were unfortunate enough to be in America at the time of *Shaq-Fu*'s release, along with the videogame, you would also likely have been subjected to a CD single taken from O'Neal's ridiculously named *Shaq-Fu: Da Return* – entitled as if to be some shameful musical companion piece to the shameful videogame, or vice versa. Thankfully, us Europeans were spared the Shaqa Demus And Pliers ear poison, but had to make up for the fact by trying to establish who this Shaq guy was and why he was so brilliant that someone would want to make a game about him.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS



We get a picture of Shaq looking like he's about to punch his pretty impressive bunny finger puppet. It's all very egotistical. And while we understand that the game clearly leans on the fact that a famous pro-basketball player has endorsed this rubbish, Delphine could have tried to be a little bit more subtle about it. This looks more like a potential cover of Shaq's ill-fated rap album, or a peculiar Billy Blanks-inspired exercise/martial arts video.

A WORD FROM THE MAIN CHARACTER

I appreciate that many of you are in doubt as to the power of my Shaquido. Well anyway, I once trained with 100 shaolin monks on several mountains to perfect my fighting techniques. I taught them to perfect their hook shoots; they showed me how to throw a flaming punch. Consequently, those shaolin guys started getting really good at playing sports, took up playing football because they 'reckoned it was the better sport, Shaq' and then went on to star in some high-budget Japanese remake of that WWII documentary *Escape To Victory, Shaolin Soccer* I think it was called. Anyway, basically the point I'm trying to make is that I knew I should have said yes to starring in *Space Jam*.



THE MAKING OF...

RIDGE RACER





FIFTEEN YEARS ON, RIDGE RACER IS STILL BURSTING OUT OF CORNERS AT DAFT SPEEDS – BUT HOW DID IT BEGIN? JONTI DAVIES CHATS WITH FUMIHIRO TANAKA, GAME DESIGNER ON THE ORIGINAL COIN-OP, AND YOZO SAKAGAMI, WHO WORKED ON THE PLAYSTATION VERSION OF THIS SEMINAL RACER

Several significant hardware and software shifts mark the early Nineties as a crucial and defining period in the history of videogames, and few games embody what those years were about more succinctly than Namco's *Ridge Racer* coin-op and its subsequent PlayStation conversion. The arcade version was one of Namco's pioneering polygonal excursions, a texture-mapped marvel of the time; not exactly a tech demo, but certainly an experiment. Meanwhile the PlayStation version, which debuted alongside Sony's first console in December 1994, admirably faced up to the challenges of presenting such memory-intensive content on CD-ROM.

As the eloquently spoken Fumihiro Tanaka recalls, *Ridge Racer* came about because of hardware advances rather than through any purely conceptual whim: "First of all, it's important to state that *Ridge Racer* was developed to make use of some newly completed polygon-capable PCB technology, albeit in the form of a proper game. I think it's fair to say *Ridge Racer*'s concept was an idea born from polygon PCB technology."

Tanaka makes this distinction, but also points out that what ended up as the instantly recognisable sports car fiction of *Ridge Racer* could have been quite different, had the *Ridge* team been swayed by the trends of 1992. "At that time in Japan, the thinking was, 'If you're going to make a car racing game, take F1 as a theme', so at first we considered making *Ridge Racer* with F1-style cars." (One look at Sega's *F1 Super Lap* or Namco's own *Final Lap R*, both of the same vintages as *Ridge Racer*, validates Tanaka's claim.) "But the result of that consideration," Tanaka continues, "was a number of different concepts which informed the final version of *Ridge Racer*: the game had to be 'on public roads', 'with machines like passenger vehicles', and it had to 'encourage players to use drift techniques'." Tanaka is confident his team made the right choice when forming that design brief. "If we had gone with a Formula 1 style of racing game, would *Ridge Racer* have been so loved by players?"

There is an argument for saying *Ridge Racer* constituted little more than a tech demo, but that notion falls apart as soon as the race begins – if anything, the "drift techniques" Tanaka mentions, which encompass the arts of powersliding and handbrake turns, outrun the impression left by *Ridge Racer*'s boundary-breaking graphics. The original *Ridge Racer* game is still a joy to play, as are most of its numerous sequels. *Ridge Racer* was, however, a

IN THE KNOW

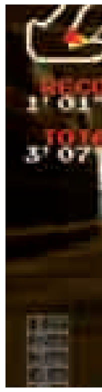


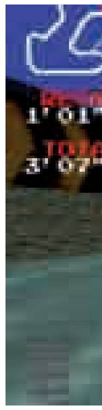
- » **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **GENRE:** RACER
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** 50P





» *Ridge Racer*'s driver AI was nothing to marvel at, but the multiplayer game introduced in *Ridge Racer 2* soon provided a greater driving challenge through human competition.





"We were racing against one of our rivals who also had a 'polygonal racer' in development"

TANAKA ON THE RIVALRY THAT FUELLED RIDGE RACER'S DEVELOPMENT

THE CAR IS THE STAR

One of the most interesting additions to the arcade code was the super-quick 'Devil' car, which paved the way for the outlandish designs of many later *Ridge Racer* vehicles. Sakagami explains how his team arrived at this design: "We were asking, 'How will real cars look in five years' time? Five years from now, what kind of cars will be running along the roads?' We considered the near future of sporty cars, and made some guesses about their design. With the Devil car, which was exclusive to the PlayStation version, we thought about what the strongest rival car should look like and settled on this black type of car that no one had ever driven before. At that time, the Devil car was so difficult to outrun that it was being called 'The Cockroach', but we didn't design it with a cockroach as inspiration…"



little different from the other games on Tanaka's CV, with technology driving development – not the other way around. "*Ridge Racer* was developed using the very latest technology we had," Tanaka explains, "so while the project was being put together by game programmers, at the same time we were also pursuing polygon technology and searching for new display methods that hadn't previously been available to us."

This focus on technology wasn't inspired by the urge to create a fully realistic driving simulator, though. "As people who know the game will appreciate, *Ridge Racer* is not a realistic 'driving simulator'," Tanaka says in a nod to *Gran Turismo*. "Of course *Ridge Racer* had a high level of programming technology and graphics techniques, but more than that, I think it was a game with a strong sense of good taste. Players back in the day were able to race through the game and enjoy a fun feeling, because it was a first-class racing game. It wasn't advanced simulation programming that made that possible, though – I think it was down to the advanced sense of game design."

Still, while the *Ridge Racer* team was not obsessed with reality to the same extent that Polyphony Digital would be later in the decade, the emergent arcade technology behind *Ridge Racer* did force Tanaka's team into some inter-developer competition. "At that time," Tanaka reminisces, "we were racing against one of our rival companies who also had a 'polygonal racing game' in development, so we were doing our best to make sure that our game was finished first – even if by just one day – and was more entertaining."

Tanaka refuses to be drawn on which company and game Namco and *Ridge Racer* were in direct competition with, but Sega and *Daytona USA* (Sega's earliest example of texture-mapped polygonal racing) is a safe bet. Regardless, Tanaka understands the irony of the situation: "I think the other company was probably in the same position, racing against us." Tanaka again turns slightly coy when we ask him about the size of the original *Ridge Racer* team. "I can't answer this in detail, but the number of team members was much smaller than what most people would imagine." The spirit of inter-developer competition, at least, lives on…

Ridge Racer's arrival on the then-thriving arcade scene roughly coincided with the boom era of rave music and happy hardcore, and *Ridge Racer* was an inadvertent champion of these ecstatic beat-driven music forms. However, Tanaka reveals that it wasn't meant to be like this: "Can you believe that initially we were planning to have no music in the game?" It's a rhetorical question, but no – no (no n-no no), we can't.

Surprisingly, the decision to mine the brightest layers of techno was taken quite lightly, with a perceived lack of time (exacerbated by paranoia of being beaten to the grid by Sega) responsible for *Ridge Racer*'s eventual sound. "*Ridge Racer*'s music was produced at the same time as the game itself," Tanaka explains. "We didn't have time in our schedule for a surplus of tracks to be composed, so that we could pick our favourites at the end of development – that just wasn't possible. We were lucky to happen upon danceable techno music for the BGM, which really helped with the process of creating this atmosphere where players could race through the game and enjoy a fun feeling."

Adding to this "fun feeling" were the *Ridge Racer* coin-op's elaborately constructed cabinets. (See 'Racing Machines' boxout.) In the *Ridge Racer* team's estimation the value of simulation was a distant second to pure fun, but Tanaka is proud of how well the arcade cabinets supported the System 22 ROMs they ran. "The theme of the game was to put you in control of a high-power sports car, enabling you to hold the steering wheel to drive through curves and bends while skidding from side to side. Therefore, it was necessary that the steering wheel conveyed the response of the tyres in a way that players could







actually feel. We had H-type gears, a clutch pedal, a large seat, and so on, all prepared so that the feeling of driving a real sports car could be conveyed properly."

Tanaka and team didn't concern themselves with how Ridge Racer might be received in different territories. This was a more innocent/naïve age, when a Japanese developer could simply set out to make a game that would be fun for players in general – not a 'product' that would attract 'consumers' in specific 'markets' so as to keep the moneymen happy. "In those days," Tanaka sighs, "we didn't really think in terms of 'intended for Japan' or 'geared towards the West'. We were developing Ridge Racer to make players experience a happy feeling, and that sense of happiness from playing games we felt was enjoyed by everyone in the global community of players."

The development of Ridge Racer wasn't entirely trouble-free, but Tanaka is happy with how Ridge Racer ended up, and he is rightly proud of the series spawned by that original 1993 coin-op. Our chat ends with Tanaka relating a brief anecdote that sums up the basic highs and lows of making a new coin-op in the early Nineties: "I still remember one incident on the morning of the first AOU Show at which we showed Ridge Racer to customers. We'd spent all night preparing the prototype ROM that would go inside the cabinet, but when we inserted it and just as we powered up the machine on that morning, the screen went white and the ROM just stopped dead. I think my heart also stopped beating at that point! Eventually we found that it wasn't a programming error to blame – it was a defective ROM, so we exchanged the ROM and managed to get by without any more problems after that, which was such a relief…"

With *Ridge Racer* quickly established as a mighty name in the world of high-tech racing arcades, it was inevitable that a home console conversion would be requested for one of the CD-ROM machines scheduled to debut in Japan in late 1994.

Yozo Sakagami introduces himself with a recollection of the how, when, who and what of *Ridge Racer*'s console debut: "Our work on the PlayStation version of *Ridge Racer* began in April 1994. Looking back at the record we kept of events at that time, it's clear that a decision on the final team members was made on 30 March 1994. There were eventually three programmers on the team, five visual staff, and one audio technician. I worked with the team as visual director. Sony had set the launch of the PlayStation hardware for 3 December 1994, so we essentially only had six months development time if we were to meet that deadline and deliver *Ridge Racer* as a PlayStation launch game."

That deadline was met – development lasted only six months – but the Namco employees responsible for this port were faced with even more challenges than Fumihiro Tanaka had encountered during his team's pursuit of the quintessential Nineties racing coin-op. The PlayStation hardware was powerful for its time, and the storage capacity of the newfangled CD-ROM format was sufficient, but data access times, purely digital controller input (the PlayStation's Analogue Controller didn't appear until 1997) and a video RAM shortfall presented significant obstacles to the kind of success Sakagami and team were intent on achieving. Part of the 'problem', Sakagami says, was how high the bar had been set by Fumihiro Tanaka's team: "Constantly during our work on the PlayStation version, we were worrying about how faithfully we would be able to reproduce the arcade version."

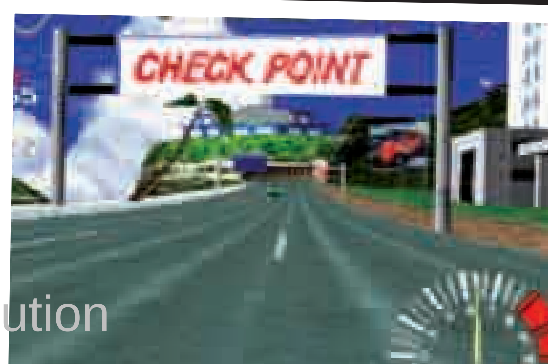
The first struggle was simply to replicate the feel of the coin-op. This was a challenge because of the restrictions of the original PlayStation controller's D-pad. "I remember at first we were thinking about how entertaining we could make the PlayStation edition with input only from a controller," Sakagami recalls, "and without the steering wheel and accelerator pedal of the coin-op. As programmers and artists, we were concerned with how we could convey the flavour of the arcade version's

RACING MACHINES

Namco manufactured four different styles of coin-op cabinet for the original *Ridge Racer* in Japan. The SD (standard) cabinet was equipped with a steering wheel, accelerator and brake pedals, and an up-down gearshift lever. The DX (deluxe) cabinet added a clutch pedal and six-speed gearbox, while also incorporating a steering wheel that was larger than that of the SD cabinet. On the DX cabinet, it was possible to change the position of the seat. There was also a three-screen version of the DX cabinet.

The fourth and most expensive *Ridge Racer* cabinet was the Full Scale option, which was built around a replica Eunos Roadster, complete with workable ignition and dashboard. The size and cost of this machine made it the least common *Ridge Racer* cabinet in Japan, although it could be found at half a dozen UK locations in 1993. The later Rave Racer cabinet was based on the Full Scale *Ridge Racer* machine, only replacing the Eunos Roadster shell with that of a Honda CR-X.

The first two-player *Ridge Racer* cabinet was the Twin model used for 1994's pseudo-sequel *Ridge Racer 2*, but this was simply constructed from two connected SD *Ridge Racer* cabinets. The Twin cabinet's high player turnover quickly established this as the most popular early *Ridge Racer* machine in the department stores and large arcades of Japan.



THE MAKING OF… RIDGE RACER



drift control, and we ended up making repeated mistakes. But it was actually out of this struggle that the neGcon was created…"

While the PlayStation controller's D-pad did a decent job of tapping into the arcade's 'drift' racing style, Namco's self-produced neGcon controller (which was released in Japan on 1 January 1995, just three weeks after the launch of the PlayStation and *Ridge Racer*) provided an even more faithful version of the coin-op's unique 'feel'. The neGcon (pronounced ne-ji-con, based on nejiru, the Japanese verb for 'twist') could be twisted to steer *Ridge Racer*'s powersliding cars, with the left and right halves of the pad joined by a swivel connection, and it also featured analogue buttons to facilitate gradual acceleration and braking.

From the perspective of the nine-man PlayStation *Ridge* team, the next major development challenge was posed by the CD-ROM format itself. "I have many memories of the development period," Sakagami says, "but the episode that still impresses me most when I think about it is to do with our investigation of loading times, and specifically how to work around them. Today loading times are normal, but at the time machines such as the Super Famicom were still using ROM cartridges, so there hadn't been any need to worry about loading times. So obviously once we started work on this CD-ROM game, we were really concerned by the prospect of loading times…"



Sakagami's anxiety over data access speeds might seem preposterous today, when players are still forced to sit through regular (and sometimes obstructive) loading times in their 'next-gen' games and when many games for Sony's third-generation PlayStation demand, or at least suggest, that players also install huge chunks of data to the hard disk in another time-consuming procedure. But back in the summer of 1994, with cartridge-based consoles still the standard, Sakagami was arguably right to be worried. "I felt as though any waiting times would leave a really bad impression," he admits, "especially considering that the PlayStation was this new high-spec piece of hardware. And our main programmer had the same opinion."

The stance taken by the *Ridge Racer* team was an innovative one, designed not to cut corners but to make the scenery of those corners more interesting to passers-by. Sakagami explains: "Loading is one of the limitations of CD-ROM technology that it's impossible to cancel out. So we considered ways of ensuring that the player wouldn't be bothered by the waiting times; we tried to make sure that players would be happier with loading screens than without them. We noticed that the tempo of the game was at its worst in the intervals where players would quit a game to restart, or where they had to wait for the rankings to be displayed. So we decided to make it so that nearly all of the game data would be retrieved at the first Namco logo screen after the game boots up. And we also decided to make it possible to play *Galaxian* at that point. We were thinking 'Somehow we've got to make this waiting time more enjoyable!'"

The inclusion of a playable version of *Galaxian* at *Ridge Racer*'s loading screens was more than just a gimmick, though – it was also one of the earliest shows of a developer referencing its own company's retro game heritage within an advanced 3D game, signalling the potential gulf between polygon-pushing software on CD-ROM and everything that had gone before. A lo-res rendition of the game in auto-play was also displayed on the gigantic virtual LCD panel above the entrance to the first tunnel on *Ridge Racer*'s now iconic first racing circuit, in another show of the future embracing the past.

We ask why, of all Namco's classics, *Galaxian* was selected to enhance *Ridge Racer*'s scenery. "Because I was on the team that made the *Galaxian* arcade, so I determined to include this excellent creation in honour of my old boss," Sakagami smiles. He clearly has great affection for *Galaxian*, and the manner of its inclusion was exciting for Sakagami: "I was shocked, because the day after we'd had this idea I found that it was already implemented in the software. The previous night, I delivered the visual materials to our lead programmer and just told him, 'Look, this is how you should configure the screen. Would you put *Galaxian* in there?' I don't know if he was just really busy with other work at the time, but his only response was a slight nod; and then, when we booted the game up the next day, there it was, almost perfectly implemented and only requiring a couple of minor adjustments. I remember being really excited by this!"

With loading times effectively concealed beneath the pixelly wonders of Namco gaming circa 1979, the PlayStation *Ridge* team's final and most important challenge was to ensure that this version of the game replicated, or at least came close to replicating, the cutting edge *Ridge Racer* coin-op. Ironically, one solution compounded another problem, as Sakagami explains: "Because we imposed this limitation whereby all of the game data was retrieved at once, drawing the graphics became a really difficult task. To ensure certain texture resolutions and capacities, we made many different texture designs by modifying identical textures from the same 16-colour palette."

The PlayStation was comparatively powerful in the context of home consoles, but it was no match for Namco's System 22 arcade board. To get past the discrepancy, Sakagami says, his team "put everything into coming up with various schemes and devices [to cut corners]. To be honest," he continues, "a third of the information that users saw on screen was the road surface. This was an important factor in reproducing the sense of speed that the *Ridge Racer* arcade had. And we decided to use high-resolution textures for the road surface, rather than normal resolution ones."

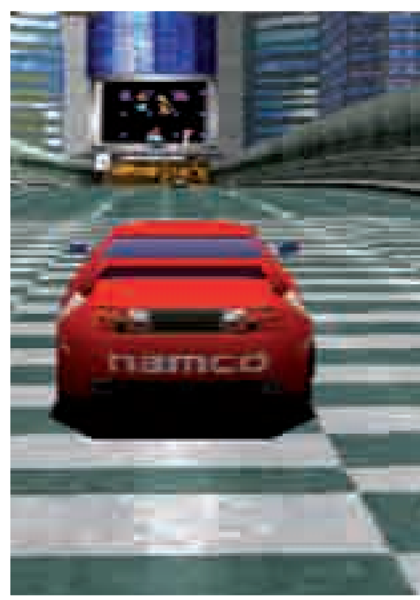
The coin-op's constant 60 frames-per-second display would remain out of reach until 1997 (see 'The Perfect Drive' boxout), and there were other conversion challenges that the PlayStation *Ridge* team struggled to meet, as Sakagami reveals: "In the arcade version of *Ridge Racer* the camera is located at a slightly lower level than the car's window, which is to make the game feel quicker. But when we tried to replicate that camera position in the PlayStation version, it always resulted in the road surface textures clipping, or appearing to flash. In simple terms, the more seams there are between polygons, the more easily this can be avoided; but to display so many polygons while also protecting the 30fps display we'd achieved was a really difficult task. We did some balancing while modifying all of the car and course data, and we polygonised the white lines on the road surface, which would otherwise have been really jagged. We ended up finding better balance through trial and error, in spite of the limitations of the hardware."

Ridge Racer was unique and hugely influential on the subsequent course of arcade and console racing games, and the series continues to be popular in Japan. While detailed driving sims have been more fashionable in recent years, the carefree nature of the *Ridge Racer* series, with its daft sense of speed and scintillating 'drift' routines, deserves to be appreciated. Yozo Sakagami concurs, explaining his love of the original: "I like the sense of speed and the drifting, and also the sound. Even though *Ridge Racer* doesn't feature real cars, I think it presents great entertainment as a game. There are so many car games, but *Ridge Racer* is different from other companies' racing games: even for people who can't drive in real life, if they play *Ridge Racer*, they get a sense of how good it must feel to drive fast."





» Some Namco promotional material showing a *Ridge Racer* arcade cabinet in all its glory.





» Namco's past and future were caught together in the transition from 2D to texture-mapped 3D advanced by *Ridge Racer*.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

PAC-MAN
SYSTEM: ARCADE (PORTED TO VIRTUALLY EVERY FORMAT)
YEAR: 1981

STARBLADE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1991

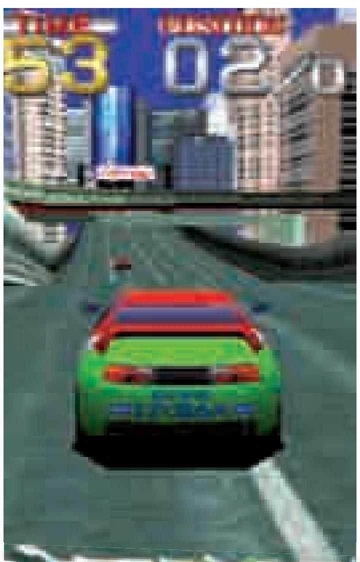
YUU YUU HAKUSHO
SYSTEM: SUPER FAMICOM
YEAR: 1993



"If we had gone with a Formula 1 style of racing game, would Ridge Racer have been so loved by players?" TANAKA ON WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

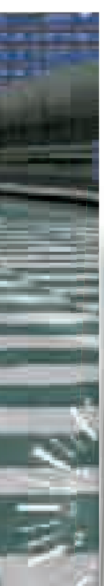


» How many miles have you clocked up in Ridge City? The now extensive *Ridge Racer* series has stayed loyal to the fictional location of *Ridge Racer*'s iconic roads.









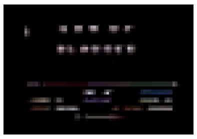
THE PERFECT DRIVE



The definitive console version of *Ridge Racer* appeared in Japan exactly four years after the launch of the PlayStation and its 30fps *Ridge Racer*. Bundled with *Ridge Racer Type 4*, the *Ridge Racer Hi-Spec Demo* achieved a 60fps refresh rate and also featured Gouraud shading, as used in *Ridge Racer Type 4*, to further enhance the visual impact of the original PlayStation *Ridge Racer* game engine. Sakagami and Co had wanted to hit 60fps in 1994, but that proved impossible: "Many of the ideas we couldn't implement in *Ridge Racer* turned up later in the series, such as an arcade-perfect 60fps refresh rate…"

SON OF BLAGGER

YOU'LL BE A MAN, MY SON



- » **PUBLISHER:** ALLIGATA
- » **RELEASED:** 1983
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** COMMODORE 64
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5



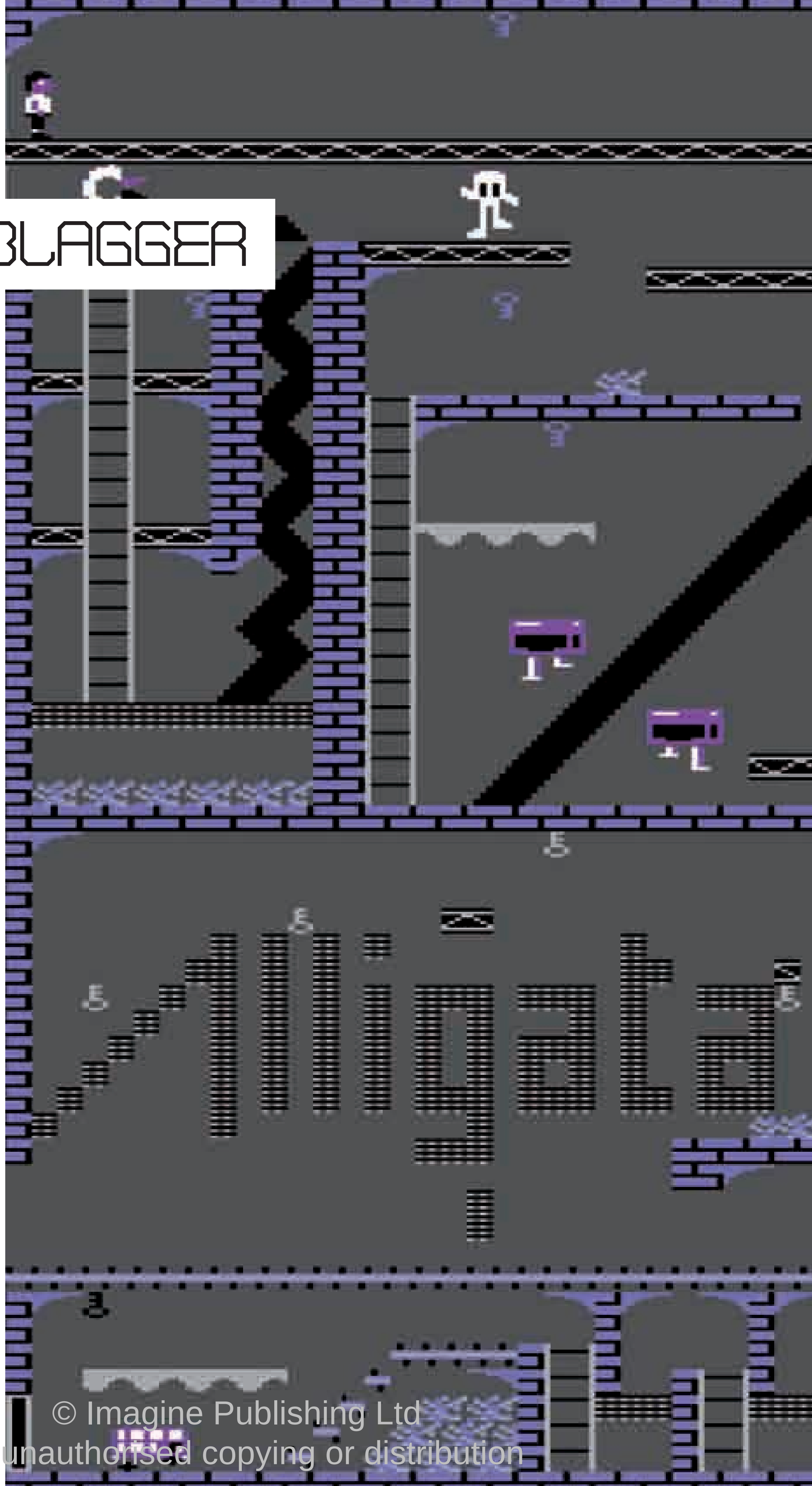
HISTORY

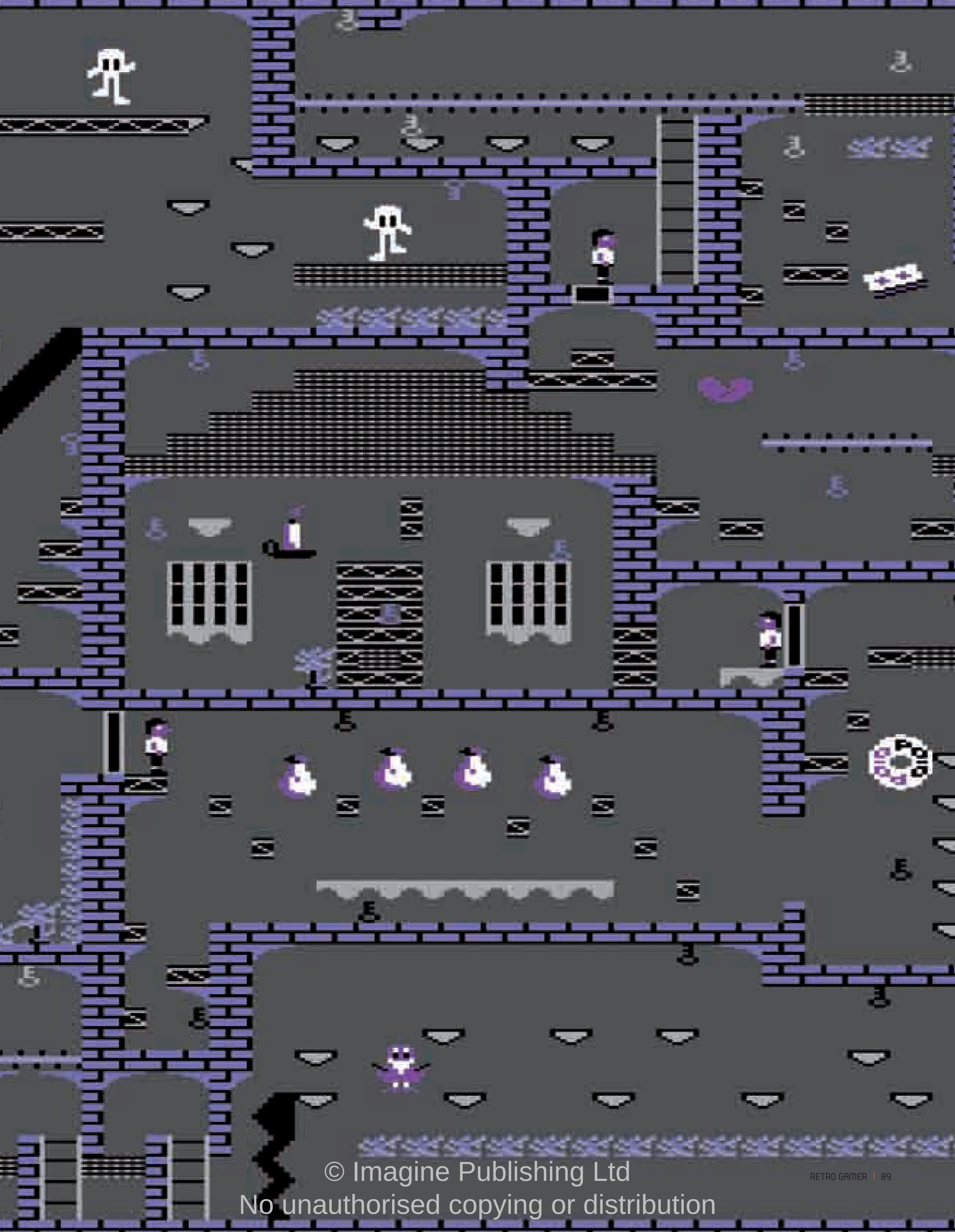
There's something bittersweet about a son outshining his father. Old man Blagger was a decent enough chap. Tough as old boots and rather too enamoured of his mate Miner Willy to really stand out from the crowd, but a good laugh nonetheless. His lad though, now he had ambition…

Son Of Blagger shared plenty of the family traits. Keys to collect, quirky enemies to avoid, patterns to learn, the pixel-perfect jumps, the unforgiving collision detection, the frequent deaths, forced repetition and the resulting chewing of fists. Yet where the dad was clearly in thrall to *Manic Miner* (the 30 screens of the original include mutant telephones, sky labs and conclude with 'The Final Conflict' if you needed any more clues), his offspring wanted to show you a whole new world.

Well, a glimpse of it at least. You peer at the game world through a letterbox, which scrolls to follow the lolloping young thief as he attempts to snatch the requisite number of keys and find the exit for each of the dozen distinct areas. Wondering just how far this bizarre construction of wonky walls, giant chutes and disappearing platforms stretched was tantalising, as was being able to sneak a peek at what was in store beyond that pesky row of deadly bushes. First stumbling upon the huge, blinking Alligata logo on Level 4 and trying to traverse it through numerous leaps of faith was especially memorable. In the days before in-game advertising was prevalent, it just seemed so cocky. Nice touch, Mr Crowther.

Looking at the game map pieced together courtesy of that most talented of retro cartographers Nigel Fishwick (visit www.btinternet.com/~fishyfish to admire more of his work) feels strange. I trace the route through each level with my finger, admiring the tessellation of the architecture now I can see the big picture. It makes me think of that time as a child when I could only see the little space where I played. And that's kind of bittersweet, too.



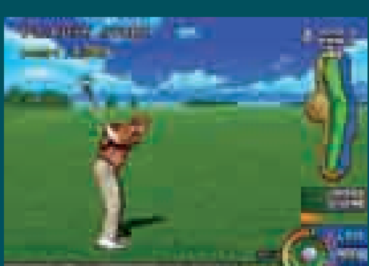


RETRORATED



It's a bit of a quiet month, but at least you'll be getting some great value for money if you purchase either of this month's PSP games. One's a great sequel, the other is arguably one of the most cost-effective compilations of all time. Not bad eh?





SNK ARCADE CLASSICS I

INFORMATION

- **SYSTEM:** PSP (ALSO COMING TO PS2)
- **PRICE:** ABOUT £15 ON IMPORT
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PUBLISHER:** SNK
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2

Now, there's still some doubt about whether or not *SNK Arcade Classics 1* will receive an official PAL release on Sony's portable. The reason for this is confounding for anyone with an ounce of business acumen. PSP has slowly become a bastion of retro compilations, with a mixed bag of brilliant (*Sega Mega Drive Collection*) and not-so-brilliant (*EA Replay*) retro packs taking up room in its library.

With the SNK back catalogue brimming with classic arcade games that few people could afford – let alone have had the opportunity to play – you'd think a compilation pack that contains so much value and variety would be a no-brainer for the PSP market.

An impressive Neo-Geo collection (which, for arguments sake, could conceivably be the games that make up this collection) would probably set you back the princely sum of around £2,500 (and that's not including the AES to play it on). So while it's fair to say that this collection – pound for pound – is the best value videogame compilation to date, you can also sympathise with many Neo-Geo collectors out there who have spent hundreds of pounds putting their collection together only to see PSP owners reap the same benefits (well, almost) on a single USD and for a fraction of the price.

Of course, the rest of us have pretty much lucked in. And *SNK Arcade Classics Volume 1* is certainly a must-own disc thanks to the timeless brilliance that comes bundled with *Metal Slug*, *Shock Troopers*, *Neo Turf Masters* and the sublime *R-Type*-esque *Last Resort*. However, the compilation is also not without a fair number of weaker titles that do bring the overall quality down somewhat.

Scanning the game roster, you'll notice that SNK is working its way, chronologically, through its back catalogue. Regardless, the varied selection on offer here means you have pretty much every genre covered. You have a few sports titles, several beat-'em-ups and a few run-and-guns to get stuck into.



OPINION

With so many Neo-Geo titles costing insane amounts of money, it's pleasing to know I can now get many of them on one handy collection. While the loading times are horrendously slow and the multiplayer painful to play, there's much to enjoy about this first volume of SNK classics. The list of games isn't as nice as I would have liked, but at least the Vol 1 prefix means that SNK Playmore is planning more releases.

Ashley Day



» Okay, now that's just a ridiculously sized fireball.



» *Magician Lord*: a magical load of crappy dialogue and gameplay.







OPINION

A lot of hardcore SNK fans aren't too impressed with SNK Playmore's latest compilation. While we haven't noticed many of the issues that their eagle eyes have apparently picked up on, we can see why they'd be upset with this latest compendium. After all, it can't be easy to spend hundreds of pounds on an elite system, only to see virtually the entire back catalogue getting released for a pittance (and possible devaluing your costly collection).

Darran Jones

Our only real gripe with this collection is the less-than-brilliant Wi-Fi multiplayer, which suffers from horrible bouts of slowdown and lag. The overall presentation – which, for some, could mean the difference between making a purchase or not – is nothing to write home about.

The general feel of the game and menu screen is nowhere near as classy as the recent Konami and Namco DS packs, and the lack of a proper widescreen mode is a real sticking point with us. Granted you get the abilty to view the games in their original pizel glory, but this drastically cuts down the screen size, making it feel like you're peering through a letterbox.

Still, here is a rundown of what you can expect in the package. There are the 'okay to great' titles, such as *Baseball Stars 2*, *King Of The Monsters*, *Last Resort*, *Metal Slug*, *Neo Turf Masters*, *Samurai Shodown*, *Super Sidekicks 3*, *Shock Troopers*, *The King Of Fighters '94*. Then you have the 'alright to not-so-good' games, like *Burning Fight*, *Magician Lord*, *Top Hunter*, *Sengoku*, *Fatal Fury* and *Art Of Fighting*.

Quite brilliantly, SNK has packaged each game with its own list of unique 'goals' (think Capcom Classics Collection). Working similarly to Xbox Achievement Points, these typically involve tasks like completing games on various difficulties, topping high scores, and beating a set number of opponents without losing a round. And in reward for your troubles you can unlock move lists, music tracks, artwork and even another game: *World Heroes*.

Basically, if you can forgive SNK Playmore for its shamefully indolent approach to this pack and are seriously considering spending some quality time with your PSP this summer, then you should really consult your nearest importer and treat yourself to a copy of *SNK Arcade Classics Volume 1*, you probably won't be disappointed.

THE SCORES

Presentation 43%
Sorely lacking the care and attention we would have hoped for.

Aesthetics 75%
Some cracking nostalgic beauties here, not bad at all.

Longevity 82%
This compilation contains enough to keep you going for a long while.

Value for Money 95%
Top-notch, one of the best-looking DS games we've seen.

Overall 80%
Definitely worth seeking out on import.

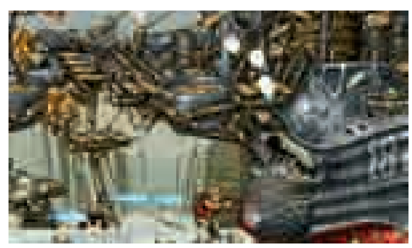


» *Last Battle*: look familiar, Bydo Empire?





» Man versus man in a truck, the excitement is killing us.





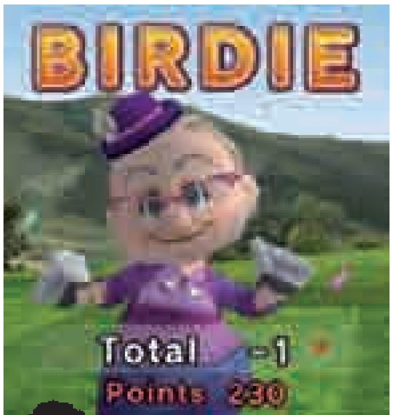
REVIEW

EVERYBODY'S GOLF 2

EVERYBODY'S GOLF, NOT INCLUDING CHURCHILL (POSSIBLY)

INFORMATION

- **SYSTEM:** PSP
- **PRICE:** £19.99
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PUBLISHER:** SONY
- **PLAYERS:** 1-16





Winston Churchill famously once said: "Golf was the best way to spoil a good walk." He is, of course, implying that the game of golf is a bit pants and he'd rather walk, uninterrupted, to a flag that's stuck in a hole rather than walking and swinging toward one with a golf club. And to be fair to Churchill, in all honesty, when you sit down and dissect the sport, it truly is a weird little pastime to get your head around.

Long grass, murky water, and raked sand are your enemy. Men and women dressed like they should be sipping cocktails on a cruise ship spend a whole day trying to smack a ball the size of gorilla's eyeball into 18 tiny holes, using a long wooden or iron spoon. Golf is a game of skill, not fitness, but it's also a game renowned for gentlemanly and womanly conduct, a game played by people who wear tweed trousers and woollen jumpers in the summer and… well, that's about it. Unless, of course, you're playing a round of *Everybody's Golf* – in which case that all goes headfirst out the nearest window.

Everybody's Golf 2 takes a different swing at the sport, giving you a whole roster of quirky and colourful-looking super-deformed golfers with which to compete. With 12 courses and a ridiculously huge selection of golfing attire and accessories to unlock, the attention to detail and added value smashed into this package by developer Clap Hanz is really rather impressive.

Adding to the dizzying array of options and play modes available, are some truly lush-looking visuals that definitely hark back to a wistful time when videogames were fun, inviting, and oozing with character. For those who have sampled the brilliance of *Everybody's Golf* on PlayStation 3, here the World Tour's strike system has been slightly altered. The swing-based power meter has been replaced with a far more conventional power bar, and for *Everybody's Golf* newcomers there's a brilliant Easy Shot mode to take the hassle out of timing your swing.

With plentiful options and a great many courses, as well as some beautifully cheery-looking visuals to soak up, the game provides a perfect way to while away an hour or two on a summer afternoon. And what golfing game out there lets you play in your underpants and wear boxing gloves without getting blasted with a tazer gun by a barky groundskeeper, eh?



» Before they take their swing, your characters have weird thoughts. They're usually about musical notes, rabbits, and turtles.

» "Big-head, you suck!"







OPINION

I'm in two minds about this PSP sequel. While it plays yet another great round of golf, it's just far too similar to the game that first launched with the PSP several years ago. Heck, even the music is the same in places and while the new multiplayer mode is nice and extensive, I can't help feeling that *Everybody's Golf 2* is more of a rehash than a direct sequel. Don't get me wrong, it's a truly excellent little game, but aside from the new online mode, there's very little point buying this if you already have the original game. There's no arguing that £20 is a great price point though.

Darran Jones

THE SCORES

Presentation 82%
Slick and polished, the presentation for *Everybody's Golf 2* is impressive.

Aesthetics 81%
Here's a game that feels really nice in your hands. Whatever that means.

Playability 85%
Short and enjoyably wacky rounds of portable golf. You can't go wrong.

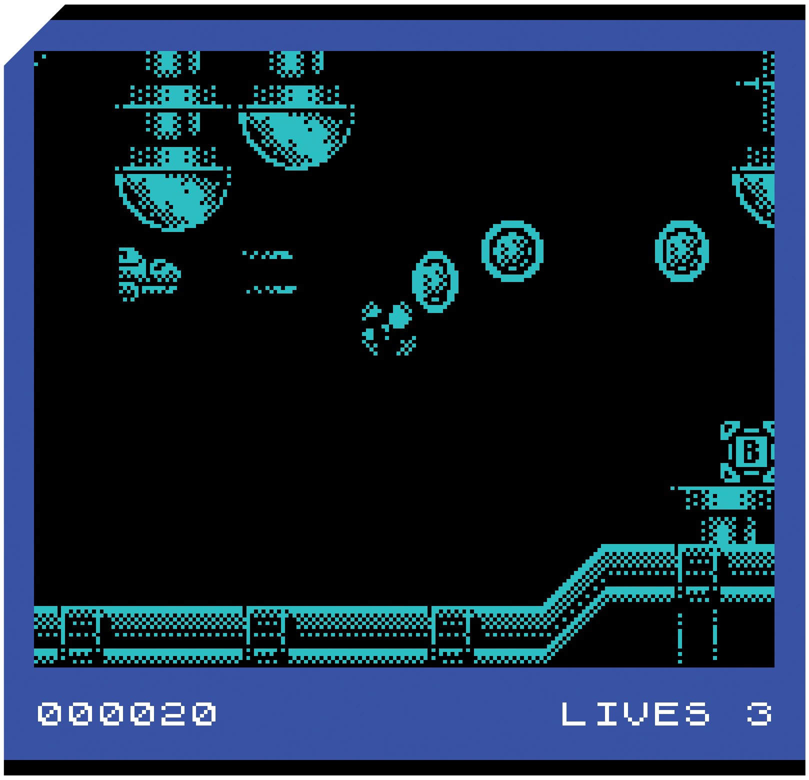
Longevity 89%
There's plenty to unlock, plenty to play, plenty of longevity. A game of plenty.

Value for Money 88%
But of course. The 20 pounds asking price is well worth it.

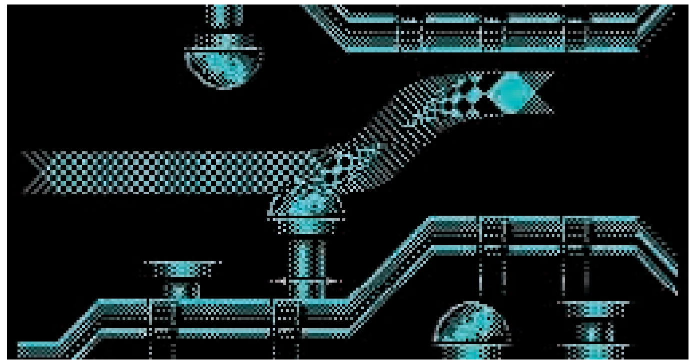
Overall 86%

HOMEBREW RATED

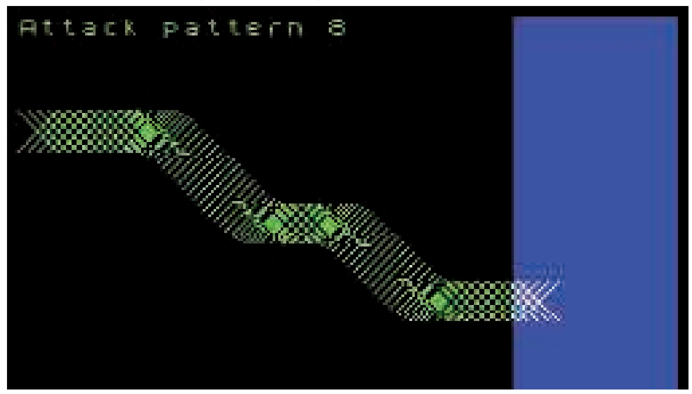
EVER FANCIED MAKING YOUR OWN SHOOT-'EM-UP FOR SPECTRUM? WELL, HERE'S YOUR CHANCE...



» With Shoot-'Em-Up Designer, you too can create your own Spectrum shooter.



» For less than a fiver, SEUD is superb value for money.



» SEUD provides long-term experimentation and entertainment.

SHOOT-'EM-UP DESIGNER

CREATING NEW UNIVERSES TO EXPLORE... AND DESTROY



FORMAT: SPECTRUM
DEVELOPED BY: CRONOSOFT
LINK: WWW.CRONOSOFT.CO.UK
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
PRICE: £3.50 (EMULATOR IMAGE) OR £4.99 (CASSETTE)
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

Shoot-'Em-Up Designer is prolific Spectrum coder Jonathan Cauldwell's third game-development tool, along with Platform Game Designer and the recently released Arcade Game Designer. While his last two titles lean toward Spectrum's forte of single-screen action, developing a good scrolling shoot-'em-up for this machine has always been a much more daunting proposal that requires a skilful and preferably experienced programmer. Now from one such programmer comes a program that allows would-be game designers access to some of the tools required to create shoot-'em-ups.

When Shoot-'Em-Up Designer (SEUD) starts, it presents the user with a simple white-on-blue menu, and from there a series of editors are available for the various facets of a game, such as tiles, the building blocks used to construct backgrounds; maps; and sprites, which can be combined to build levels and then populate them. There are also several options to customise the overall feel of the game, features such as the size of the play area, direction of scrolling, how the player's craft animates, how many bullets can be fired simultaneously and how fast they move can all be tweaked as the game is constructed in order to tune the gameplay.

Most of these editors are somewhat sparse due to memory constraints, the tile and sprite editors don't display thumbnail images of what is being designed and the keyboard controls aren't entirely intuitive so regular references to the documentation, which is reasonable but could do with some expansion for some topics it covers, are required for the first few outings.

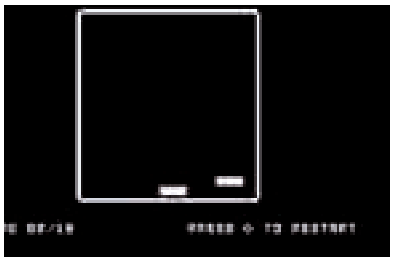
One small annoyance is the scrolling window Options menu. The manual doesn't explain that changing the direction of scrolling or re-sizing the window will cause the editor to confirm the action because it needs to wipe the current level data. These options therefore should be planned before the levels are designed. And like other construction kits, Shoot-'Em-Up Designer can't offer every possible option a game developer could ask for and there are limits to what kinds of game can be authored with it. The attackers can't fire back at the player, there is a single colour per level for foreground, and the background only moves in a single, predetermined direction, either scrolling constantly, pushed along by the player or stopping for things like boss battles.

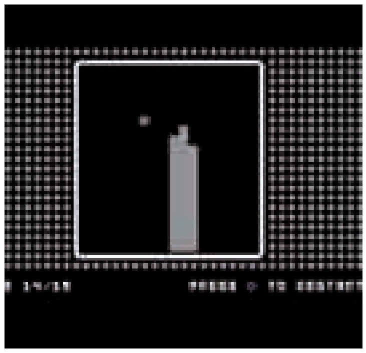
Of course, the strength of any game-creation tool is what users are able to produce and, despite the limitations it has, SEUD does still offer a good amount of flexibility for people to experiment with. Once you are aware of the boundaries of the program and how to get something playable going, the only limitations are memory – which SEUD keeps a tally of on the main menu – and the users' imagination. So with a small investment of time and effort there's a lot of enjoyment to be found. That budget price tag really seems worth it for the long-term entertainment SEUD can offer.

THE SCORES

PRESENTATION: 88% A good selection of options to create a game.
AESTHETICS: 76% The menus and editors are functional.
PLAYABILITY: N/A
LONGEVITY: 93% It will last as long as users have ideas to feed it.
VALUE FOR MONEY: 92% There aren't many things this fun for a fiver.
OVERALL: 92%

COLOURED BLOCKS AND GEMS, A MAJOR PART OF THE INDY GAME DEVELOPER'S STAPLE DIET EVERYWHERE





STACKER

TAKING BLOCKS TO A HIGHER LEVEL?



» Despite appearances, this is not *Tetris*. Sadly.



» Thank God for this screen.

FORMAT: COMMODORE 64
DEVELOPED BY: RETRO 64
LINK: WWW.RETRO64.INFO
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK



Although it might initially look like a graphically weak Tetris-styled puzzler, Stacker, as anyone who has been to a seaside resort, funfair, or even certain shopping centres in the last couple years will know, is a concession game based on a very simple principle. A row of three boxes bounce back and forth across the play area, and pressing the only button on the machine will stop them. If all three are nestled on top of the row below then all is well, but if any are left hanging in space they will be lost and when the game moves on to the next, faster moving row of blocks only the remainder will appear. The game is over if all three blocks are lost in this way, and unlike *Tetris*, reaching the top of the play area makes you the winner.

The gameplay is pretty much just a test of the player's reactions: whenever the moving row of blocks is aligned over the previously placed ones, slap the space bar. What sells the concept in the original is the prize-giving nature of the machine, players reaching a point about two thirds of the way up the play area will be offered options to either receive a small prize or continue toward the top for one of the major items. This element has, of course, been lost and what remains is as primitive as games get, but it does have something of an addictive quality that can while away a spare ten minutes.

THE SCORES

PRESENTATION: 51% Very sparse, no options at all apart from a Quit key.
AESTHETICS: 49% Average sound, weak graphics, and annoying colours.
PLAYABILITY: 58% Fun, although only in the short term.
LONGEVITY: 47% Something to dip into occasionally.
VALUE FOR MONEY: N/A
OVERALL: 43%

SWAPZ

BETWEEN A PRECIOUS ROCK AND A HARD PLACE



FORMAT: ATARI 8-BITS
DEVELOPED BY: FANDAL
LINK: ATARI.FANDAL.CZ/DETAIL.PHP?FILES_ID=5770
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

There are a few puzzle games that have been endlessly cloned or converted over the years and Bejewelled certainly ranks high on that list. The concept behind it is simple, the player has a field of gems in front of them and, by picking two and selecting two to swap over either vertically or horizontally, they must create rows or columns of three or more matching stones. This implementation for the Atari 8-bits is executed well; the graphics are above average and reasonably colourful, the music suits the mood, with the in-game tune being a particularly nice piece. And with a high-score table and a good title page it's a generally well presented title.



» *Swapz* is a gem of a title and one of many *Bejeweled* clones.



» It's instant game over if you see this screen. Very annoying.



» With no timer, *Swapz* lacks the intense pace of similar titles.

There's a small problem in the gameplay though, there isn't a timer, so players can spend as long as they like mulling over which gems to swap for best effect. The game will even highlight one of the stones in a possible move to help things along. But despite the sedate pace this generates, if no moves are remaining the game is suddenly over regardless of how well the player was doing previously. Since it's sometimes hard to plan ahead because you don't know in advance what gems will be arriving into the play area after a move is made, a massive run of good-scoring fortune can suddenly and frustratingly be wiped out. This means that this otherwise polished rendition of a classic game is sometimes unfair. The overall package suffers as a result.

THE SCORES

PRESENTATION: 72% Nicely presented, but no options after the sound.
AESTHETICS: 82% Good, colourful graphics, very nice music and effects
PLAYABILITY: 80% Simple shape-matching fun for everyone.
LONGEVITY: 73% Could become a bit repetitive after time.
VALUE FOR MONEY: N/A
OVERALL: 79%

BARGAIN HUNT

HUNT DOWN BARGAINS OR JUST DRINK UP THE LOVELINESS OF ALL THIS RETRO GOODNESS. FEAST YOUR EYES ON SIX PAGES OF THE VERY BEST THAT RETRO GAMING HAS TO OFFER…

Collecting retro games can be great fun, but you need to have a rough idea how much it's going to cost you. So here for your buying pleasure is Retro Gamer's buyer's guide. Where possible we have endeavoured to list the earliest international launch date, be it Asia, America or Europe. Prices were compiled from a variety of sources, including eBay, Japanese auctions, car-boot sales, traders and general consensus. Foreign items will often be cheaper in their local country, so regional differences should be considered. Also, bear in mind that online items will often be cheaper than you will find in specialist stores. If you see an item selling for far less, good for you! We aim to help with finding those bargains, but if you see an item sold for much higher make sure you really want to purchase it. Prices fluctuate and the market sways, so there can never be a concrete listing. Bear in mind that something is worth as much as someone else is willing to pay. No one is perfect though, and we will openly admit that with over a hundred different systems to list, mistakes can happen. If you spot a glaring error in our listings, please drop us an email at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and let us know about it.

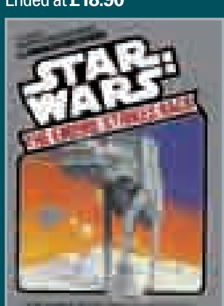
RETRO AUCTION WATCH

Retro Gamer will be sifting through countless pages of eBay and reporting on any items of interest (hardware and software) that have caught our eye. As you may have noticed, we've changed the theme recently and are looking at specific categories. To tie in with our main feature, this month we're looking at Star Wars games

STAR WARS: MASTERS OF TERAS KASI
System: **PlayStation**
Normally sells for **£4**
Ended at **No Sale**



STAR WARS: THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK
System: **Atari 2600**
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£18.90**



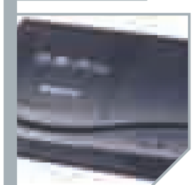
3DO



3DO GOLDSTAR
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£45+ ($83 - $111)**

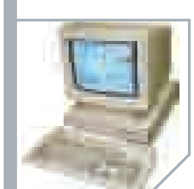


PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 - £60 ($74 - $111)**

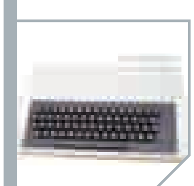


PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
While 3DO systems had much potential, there wasn't enough software support and it eventually stopped production. There were still some great games released.
- STAR CONTROL 2
- RETURN FIRE
- CRASH AND BURN

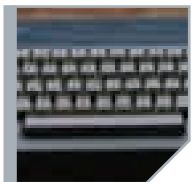
ACORN



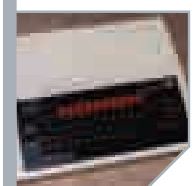
ARCHIMEDES
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) with games**
Early RISC-based home computer, quite powerful at the time.



ATOM
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**
Extremely old home computer by Acorn that's now hard to find.



ACORN ELECTRON
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Budget version of the BBC home computer (below).



BBC MICRO
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
A classic British home computer, and quite popular. Affectionately known as 'the Beeb'.
- EXILE
- ELITE
- WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

AMSTRAD



CPC 464
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
Early classic 8-bit home computer from Amstrad, designed to compete against the C64 and ZX Spectrum. This early model has a built-in cassette tape deck. Beware the models that come with a green screen monitor.



CPC 664
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90+ ($165+)**
Like the 464, except with a floppy disk drive. A short-lived model that was soon replaced by the superior 6128.



CPC 6128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25+ ($46+)**
Improved model which doubled the RAM of previous iterations. Later 'Plus' models came with a cartridge port.
- GET DEXTER
- XOR
- SORCERY +



GX4000
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
Console version of the CPC Plus range, came with joypads. Limited range of games.
- BURNIN' RUBBER
- PANG
- SWITCHBLADE

APPLE



APPLE II
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+) with games**
Like many early computers the Apple II was hand-built and sold to enthusiasts.
- KARATEKA
- ULTIMA IV
- LODE RUNNER

ATARI



400/800/600XL/XE
» YEAR **1979**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Series of old 8-bit Atari home computers.
- DROP ZONE
- THRUST
- ZYBEX



2600 (VCS)
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Earliest console by Atari. Various models, many with the classic wood panelling effect. Many UK gamers had their first taste of videogames on this.
- PITFALL
- ADVENTURE
- COSMIC ARK

SPONSORED BY FORCE 18

RARITY GUIDE

●●●●● ROCKING HORSE SHIT
●●●● HEN'S TEETH
●●● LUCKY FIND
●● EBAY REGULAR
● CAR-BOOT SALE BARGAIN

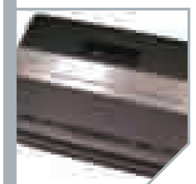


5200

» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY ●●●●
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**

Unpopular successor to the 2600, regarded as an Atari 400 without a keyboard.

- RESCUE ON FRACTALUS
- DIG DUG
- ZAXXON



7800

» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY ●●
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

Handily, Atari made the 7800 backwards compatible with the ever popular 2600.

- KARATEKA
- CHOPLIFTER
- WINTER GAMES

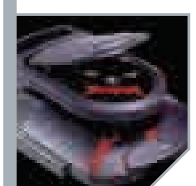


JAGUAR

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY ●
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

Failed attempt to beat the PlayStation and Saturn in the console race. Few decent games. But it does have Jeff Minter's *Tempest*!

- TEMPEST 2000
- ALIEN VS PREDATOR
- BATTLESPHERE (RARE AND EXPENSIVE!)



JAGUAR CD

» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY ●●●●
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**

Rare and overpriced CD add-on for the Jaguar. Very few games, but it does look very much like a toilet seat!

- BATTLEMORPH CD
- HIGHLANDER CD
- TEMPEST 2000 MUSIC CD



LYNX I/II (2ND IS SMALLER)

» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY ●●
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

Powerful handheld from Atari that failed due to poor marketing and battery life.

- BLUE LIGHTNING
- CALIFORNIA GAMES
- DIRTY LARRY RENEGADE COP



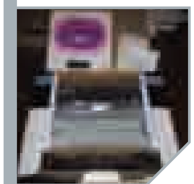
ST

» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY ●
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) depending on model**

This is an Atari home computer and a big rival to the Amiga. There are many different models available, of various specifications.

- DUNGEON MASTER
- POPULOUS
- DAMOCLES

BANDAI



GUNDAM RX-78 COMPUTER

» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY ●●●●●
» PRICE **£75+ ($138+) prices fluctuate wildly**

Ultra-rare, early Japanese games computer by Bandai. Aimed at both gamers and anime fans. Expect to pay a much higher price for a machine that's in mint condition.

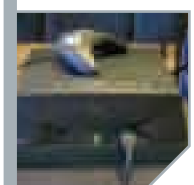


PLAYDIA

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY ●●●●●
» PRICE **£90 ($166) and upwards according to eBay**

Bizarre Japan-only console, apparently made for kids.

- SAILOR MOON
- ULTRAMAN
- DRAGON BALL Z



PIPPIN (ATMARK)

» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY ●●●●●
» PRICE **Approx £500+ ($921+)**

A strange hybrid system from Bandai and Apple. Very expensive and with very few games available. Its high price means that it's normally only sought after by collectors.

- RACING DAYS
- DRAGON BALL Z
- GUNDAM TACTICS



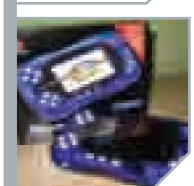
WONDERSWAN (B/W)

» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY ●●
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



WONDERSWAN COLOR

» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY ●●
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL

» YEAR **2000**
» RARITY ●●
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**

Handheld system by Bandai, fairly popular. Can now be bought very cheaply, especially in Japan. Be sure to buy the SwanCrystal, which is basically an improved 'Color' model. Both colourised models can run B/W WS games.

- GUNPEY EX
- SWAN COLOSSEUM
- JUDGEMENT SILVERSWORD

COMMODORE



AMIGA 500/600/1200

» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY ●
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) more with games, depending on model**

Classic and incredibly popular 16-bit home computer by Commodore that was designed to compete against the Atari ST range. Vast array of different models with differing specs. The Amiga 500 (with a RAM upgrade) is a particular favourite with many gamers.

- SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE
- LEMMINGS
- SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER



C16/PLUS 4

» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY ●●●
» PRICE **£15+ ($28+)**

The less well-known sibling of the C64, but without the compatibility of its peers.

- TUTTI FRUTTI
- MONTY ON THE RUN
- KIKSTART



C64

» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY ●
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**

One of the bestselling 8-bit home computers of all time. Competed against the Spectrum and Amstrad home computers. Featured the wonderful SID sound chip that was put to amazing use by the likes of Ben Daglish and Rob Hubbard.

- WIZBALL
- MAYHEM IN MONSTERLAND
- PARADROID



C64 GS (GAMES SYSTEM)

» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY ●●●●
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**

Commodore's cartridge-based machine that tried to take on both Nintendo and Sega. Sadly failed due to a lack of support from most publishers.

- PANG
- NAVY SEALS
- BATTLE COMMAND



C128

» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY ●●●
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**

Three machines (CPM, C64 and C128) in one box. Specialised software is relatively small in number.



CDTV

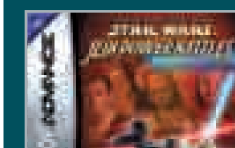
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY ●●●●
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

Commodore aimed for the 'every home should have one' market and missed by a country

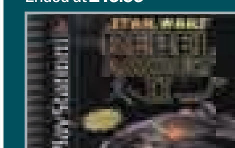
STAR WARS
System: **NES**
Normally sells for **£12**
Ended at **£21.89**



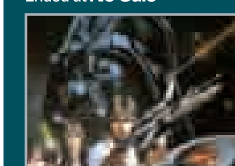
STAR WARS: JEDI POWER BATTLES
System: **GBA**
Normally sells for **£25**
Ended at **£16.03**



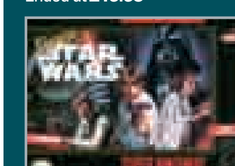
STAR WARS REBEL ASSAULT II: THE HIDDEN EMPIRE
System: **PlayStation**
Normally sells for **£8**
Ended at **£16.56**



STAR WARS
System: **Amstrad**
Normally sells for **£2**
Ended at **No Sale**



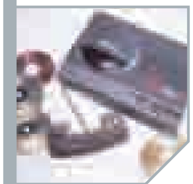
SUPER STAR WARS
System: **SNES**
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£16.68**



STAR WARS: EPISODE I BATTLE FOR NABOO
System: **N64**
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£4.51**



mile. A curious mixture of games and educational material.



CD32
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**

CD-based console that followed on from the experimental CDTV. Sometimes described as a consolised Amiga 1200 with CD drive. Despite featuring some extremely impressive games, the majority failed to improve on their 500 and 1200 counterparts.

- EXILE
- SIMON THE SORCERER
- ALIEN BREED 3D



VIC-20
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) based on condition/extras**

The computer that established the Commodore brand.

- HELLGATE
- SERPENTINE
- SUPER SMASH

FUJITSU



FUJITSU FM COMPUTERS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+)**

Early Nineties home computers by Fujitsu.



FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200+ ($368+)**

A legendary console, which contains both a CD and disk drive. Based on Fujitsu's old FM Towns computers, and mostly backwards compatible with the majority of games. Very expensive (especially if you find a machine in mint condition), but with a lot of chic!

- ZAK MC KRAKEN
- TATSUJIN OU
- SCAVENGER 4

MISCELLANEOUS



BALLY ASTROCADE
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

Early videogame system that used interchangeable cartridges, developed by the Bally games division at Midway Games.

- GATE ESCAPE
- ICBM ATTACK
- TREASURE COVE



BARCODE BATTLER
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($18)**

Handheld LCD game, where you must swipe barcoded cards (or barcodes taken from soup packets!) to gather stats, and then battle against someone else who swiped barcodes. We're not making this up…

- WE STARTED NOTHING: THE TING TINGS
- THINK TANK: BLUR
- DOG MAN STAR: SUEDE



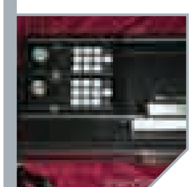
CASIO LOOPY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**

More insanity from the Land of the Rising Sun. This is a console designed especially for female gamers and it even allows stickers to be printed out… Casio had hoped it would do better than its PV-1000 console released in 1983.



FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F
» YEAR **1976**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) from the USA**

The first commercially released console that used programmable cartridges. A real piece of history. Despite this, it's surprisingly cheap to purchase (although importing from the US may cost a fair amount).



COLECOVISION
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) standalone**

Coleco's third-generation videogame system. Quite a few decent games, and considering its age it's a fairly powerful machine. Many of its arcade conversions were considered superior to the other systems on the market.

- CONGO BONGO
- SMURPH RESCUE
- CABBAGE PATCH KIDS



DRAGON 32/64
» YEAR **1982/3**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15) very cheap on eBay**

Early British home computer that tried to cash in on the early Eighties boom. Short-lived, though quite popular. The 64 model was released roughly a year after the 32.

- GRID RUNNER
- DEVIL ASSAULT
- CAVE FIGHTER



ARCADIA 2001
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

Failed console by Emerson that had numerous different clones released, as well.

- FUNKY FISH
- JUNGLER
- ROBOT KILLER



EPOCH CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

Obscure early Japanese console, which in 1983 had a budget 'Junior' model released.



EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**

Epoch's successor to the Cassette Vision, it was also marketed in Europe under the Yeno label. Apparently it only had around 30 games released for it.



INTELLIVISION
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40+ ($74+) depending on extras**

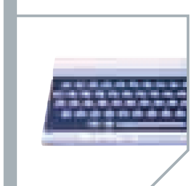
Developed by Mattel, the system was revolutionary. It was the first console to be technically 16-bit, go online (to download games), and it featured voice synthesis. Today it still has a strong retro following.

- FROG BOG
- ARMOR BATTLE
- LOCK 'N' CHASE



ODYSSEY
» YEAR **1972**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

The original home videogame console, even before Atari got in on the act. Created by Ralph Baer, this is the ultimate piece of gaming history. Fortunately, it can be purchased relatively cheaply.



ORIC-1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

The Oric-1 was a highly underrated 8-bit bit home computer created by Oric Products International. Despite having many games that were arguably superior to those on the Spectrum it was sadly unable to compete with the rival machine's high sales.

- XENON1
- INSECT INSANITY
- RAT SPLAT



PLAYSTATION
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on condition/model**

After manufacturing MSX machines, Sony re-entered the games hardware market and this time took it over. There are countless excellent PS games. It was later re-released as the PSone, which is more expensive but looks much nicer.

- CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
- FINAL FANTASY VII
- RIDGE RACER



SAM COUPÉ
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 - £200 ($92 - $368) allegedly for a mint system**

Originally developed by Miles Gordon Technology in Swansea, the Sam Coupé was a unique 8-bit British home computer that didn't fare very well. It could even emulate the 48K Speccy to a degree.

- DEFENDERS OF THE EARTH
- ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS
- PRINCE OF PERSIA



SUPERVISION
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

Marketed by several different companies, this was essentially a cut-price competitor to the monochrome Game Boy. Unsurprisingly, it was not manufactured for very long and is now hard to find.



TIGER ELEC. GAME.COM
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

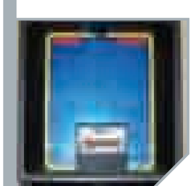
Attempt by Tiger Electronics to compete against the Game Boy.

- RESIDENT EVIL 2
- SONIC JAM
- DUKE NUKEM 3D



TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)
» YEAR **1983/4**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

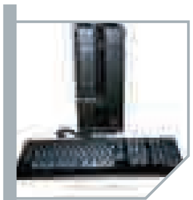
Series of old computers by Tomy.



VECTREX (MB/GCE)
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**

The only home system ever to come with a vector display, enabling true vector graphics.

- SPACE WAR
- SPINBALL
- HYPERCHASE

X68000

» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90+ ($166+)**
Home computer by Sharp, released only in Japan. Famous for its arcade ports.
- CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES
- STREET FIGHTER 2
- FINAL FIGHT

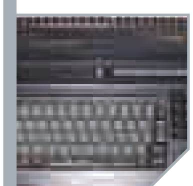
MSX

MSX 1

» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
An early attempt to create a standard gaming platform, fairly common in the UK.
- PENGUIN ADVENTURE
- KNIGHTMARE
- THE GOONIES

MSX 2

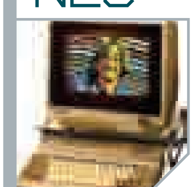
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Updated and more powerful version of the MSX, very popular in Holland and Brazil where even today some excellent home-brew games are developed.
- METAL GEAR 2
- ALESTE 2
- VAMPIRE KILLER

MSX 2+

» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Another hardware update that proved to be very popular in Holland.
- SPACE MANBOW
- GOLVELLIUS 2
- F1 SPIRIT 3D SPECIAL

MSX TURBO R

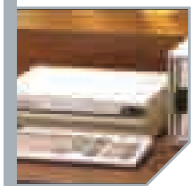
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
A final and not very popular hardware update, that was virtually exclusive to Japan.
- FRAY
- PRINCESS MAKER
- ILLUSION CITY

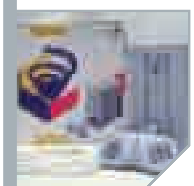
NEC

PC-6### (ALSO MK II)

» YEAR **1984 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) depending on model**
Quite old 6000 series of home computers by NEC, with a lot of cool Japanese games for it. Released in the US as the NEC Trek. Be careful of shipping prices.

PC-8801

» YEAR **1981 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) cheap on Yahoo! Japan**
Old computer series by NEC, with several different models over the years. Has a massive roster of cool games, including the original *Silpheed*. While very cheap to buy online from Japan, shipping is expensive.

PC-9801

» YEAR **1983 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) cheap on Yahoo! Japan**
Another home computer series by NEC, again with many great games. Laptop versions also exist. Most games by Falcom are worth watching out for.

PCFX

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) prices can fluctuate**
32-bit tower console by NEC, resembles a PC. Released in Japan only, had software support until 1998. Only a few action titles. Apparently, it also had quite a bit of hentai on it.
- LAST IMPERIAL PRINCE
- CHOUJIN HEIKI ZEROIGAR (SHMUP)
- ZENKI FX (FIGHTER)

PC-ENGINE

» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£55 ($101)**
Classic piece of Japanese hardware from NEC which features many excellent arcade ports and a few exclusives. The CoreGrafx system is basically a PC-Engine with AV output.

PC-ENGINE GT

» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70+ ($129+)**
Portable handheld version of the Japanese PC-Engine that played all Japanese Hu-Cards.

TURBO GRAFX-16

» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
American version of the PC-Engine. It has territory lockout, so the two systems' Hu-Cards are not compatible.

TURBO EXPRESS

» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) massive fluctuations**
Portable handheld version of the American Turbo Grafx-16.
- BONK/PC KID SERIES
- PC KID
- OUTRUN

SUPER GRAFX

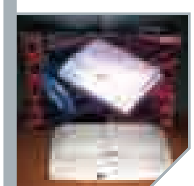
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147) prices can fluctuate**
Meant to be the successor to the original PC-Engine, but sadly failed due to lack of games. It is backwards compatible, but only had six games specifically released for it.
- ALDYNES
- DARIUS PLUS
- GHOULS AND GHOSTS

PC-E CD-ROM/ TURBO GRAFX CD

» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
CD-ROM add-on for the PC-E and TG16, released in 1988 and 1989. It has no region lockout.

PC-E DUO/TURBO DUO

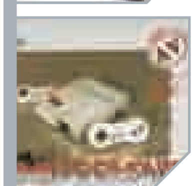
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£120 ($221)**
System that combines the PC-E/TG16 with its CD add-on. Released in both Japan and America in 1991 and 1992. The CD games still have no region lockout.

DUO-R

» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Stripped-down white version of the PC-E Duo, without headphone port. Later in 1994 a Duo-RX version was released, slightly blue in colour and came with a six-button control pad.
- DRACULA X
- SHUBIBINMAN 3
- LORDS OF THUNDER

NINTENDO

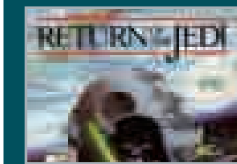
FAMICOM

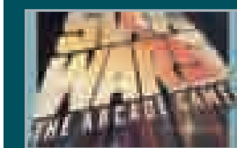
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£60 ($111)**
Nintendo's first foray into the home console market, with over 1,000 games to choose from!

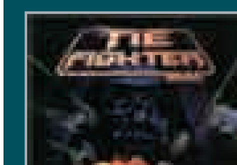
FAMICOM AV

» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
A cheaper remodelled version of the Famicom, now with AV output.

FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM

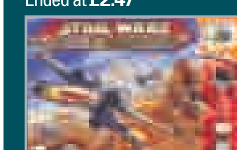
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Nintendo's attempt to bring cheap rewritable disk-based gaming to the masses. Be warned, the drive belts break very easily.

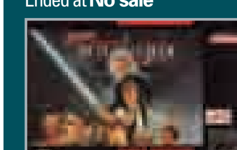
RETURN OF THE JEDI
System: **Spectrum**
Normally sells for **£1+**
Ended at **No Sale**


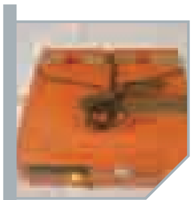
STAR WARS: THE ARCADE GAME
System: **Atari 5200**
Normally sells for **£55**
Ended at **£80**


STAR WARS: TIE FIGHTER
System: **DOS**
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£3.78**


STAR WARS: JEDI ARENA
System: **Atari 2600**
Normally sells for **£12**
Ended at **£5.89**


STAR WARS: ROGUE SQUADRON
System: **N64**
Normally sells for **£8**
Ended at **£2.47**


SUPER STAR WARS: RETURN OF THE JEDI
System: **SNES**
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **No sale**




SHARP FAMICOM TWIN

» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**

Combined Famicom and Disk System, by Sharp.

- OTOCKY
- NAZO NO MURASAMEJOU
- PATLABOR



GAME&WATCH

» YEAR **1980-1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£1+ ($2+)**

Series of handheld LCD games that were created by the legendary Gunpei Yokoi.



GAME BOY B/W

» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($9)**

Nintendo's original handheld portable, with interchangeable cartridges. Despite its age, and monochrome display, there are many excellent classic GB games.

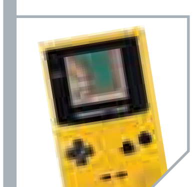


GAME BOY POCKET

» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15)**

A smaller and more compact Game Boy, with improved screen. A Japanese version with built-in light was released and sells for a much higher price.

- SUPER MARIO LAND
- TETRIS
- POKÉMON



GAME BOY COLOR

» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£12 ($22)**

Colour-based version of the classic Game Boy. Backwards compatible, but it also has several exclusive games that were rather special.

- METAL GEAR SOLID: GHOST BABEL
- RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN
- HARVEST MOON 3



GAME BOY ADVANCE

» YEAR **2001**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**



N64

» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

Nintendo's last cartridge-based console, competitor to the PlayStation and Saturn. Has several highly sought-after classics. Some games (like *Donkey Kong*) require the RAM expansion pack and wouldn't run without it.

- SUPER MARIO 64
- PILOTWINGS 64
- BLAST CORPS

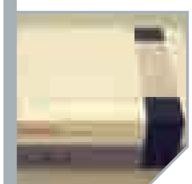


N64 DD

» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**

Another attempt by Nintendo to incorporate disc media with one of its cartridge-based consoles. Expensive and very few games were released.

- F-ZERO EXPANSION KIT
- MARIO ARTIST SERIES
- DOSHIN THE GIANT



NES (TOASTER)

» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

The Western version of the Famicom, popular the world over. Plenty of great Nintendo classics to choose from, and it's very cheap too.



NES (DOG BONE)

» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**

Remodelled and improved version of the traditional NES. Region lockout was also removed, meaning all 72-pin based NES games work.

- METROID
- THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
- SUPER MARIO BROS. 3



SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)

» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

Nintendo's successor to the NES, and one of the company's most popular machines. A retro staple with a fantastic selection of games.



SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JAPAN)

» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**

Cheaper and redesigned SNES.

- SUPER METROID
- SECRET OF MANA
- SUPER MARIO WORLD



VIRTUAL BOY

» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**

Nintendo's failed attempt at a pseudo Virtual Reality games system. Quite a novelty as there is nothing else like it. Be warned though, as many gamers have complained that the machine gives them headaches – never a good thing.

- INSMOUSE NO YAKATA (HP LOVECRAFT INSPIRED FPS)
- WARIO LAND
- RED ALARM

PHILIPS



CD-I 205/210/220

» YEAR **from 1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

Unique system by Philips. The 200 series consists of front-loading systems, with each one having slightly different specifications.



CD-I 450/500

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) more with DVC**

This is the consolised version of previous models, with the latter 500 series featuring an integrated DVC.

- BURN CYCLE
- HOTEL MARIO



VIDEOPAC G7000

» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

Popular across the world (especially Brazil and Holland) and known also as the 'Odyssey 2'.



VIDEOPAC G7400

» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

A successor to the G7000 that was backwards compatible.

- QUEST FOR RINGS
- PICKAXE PETE
- MUNCHKIN

SEGA



32X

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) (with leads)**

Failed Mega Drive add-on, designed to enhance its capabilities.

- KNUCKLES CHAOTIX
- KOLIBRI
- DARXIDE



DREAMCAST

» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46) depending on extras**

Sega's final hardware release. No gamer should be without it. Amazing official roster of games, plus it can emulate older systems.

- SHENMUE
- SKIES OF ARCADIA
- REZ

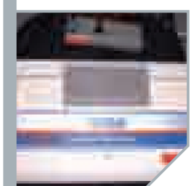


GAME GEAR

» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28) more with extras**

Handheld by Sega, designed to compete against the Game Boy. Low battery life, but effectively a portable Master System. With add-on tuner, could also be used as a TV (as shown here).

- SHINOBI 2
- COLUMNS
- TV TUNER



SG-1000 (PLUS THE MARK II AND III)

» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50-£150 ($80-$260)**

Sega's first console, and a piece of history. The Mark III model would later be redesigned to become the Master System. Like the Japanese Famicom, it's much nicer than the UK version.



SC-3000

» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £50 ($92)**

Computer equivalent of the SG-1000, also by Sega. Was popular in Australia and other ex-colonies. Mutually compatible with the SG-1000 as well.



MASTER SYSTEM I/II

» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) with leads etc**

Popular Sega 8-bit console, which competed against the NES. Adapted from previous systems.

- PHANTASY STAR
- WONDER BOY 3: DRAGON'S TRAP
- CALIFORNIA GAMES



AMSTRAD MEGA PC

» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) according to eBay**

A strange hybrid between an Amstrad PC and a Mega Drive. A nice collectable oddity, though according to past eBay auctions, not a high seller.



TERADRIVE

» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £100 ($184)**

Another Mega Drive computer hybrid. Released earlier than the Amstrad

hybrid, these systems have no connection. Due to being exclusive to Japan, they are seldom seen in the wild. Likely to be very expensive if you are able to find one.



MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II
» YEAR **1989+**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on model**
The big daddy, Sega's most successful console and a retro classic.

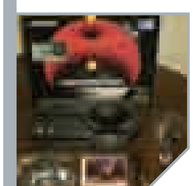


GENESIS 3
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Developed by Majesco. This third, cut-down model is rarer and has some compatibility issues. USA only.



NOMAD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Handheld Mega Drive. Pricey, low battery life and some compatibility problems.

- RANGER-X
- THUNDER FORCE IV
- COMIX ZONE



MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/ CDX/X'EYE
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+) depending on system**
A series of different hybrid MD and MCD systems, released in the three main territories.



MEGA CD (SCD) I/II
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+) depending on system**
Sega's CD add-on for the Mega Drive. Despite heavy criticism, has many excellent games.

- POPFUL MAIL
- SNATCHER
- SONIC CD



PICO
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) more with games**
Toy computer released for young children. The games come in nice storybook-style boxes.

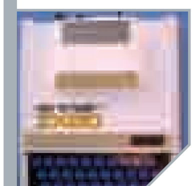
- SONIC'S GAMEWORLD
- ECCO JR AND THE GREAT OCEAN HUNT
- THE LION KING: ADVENTURES AT PRIDE ROCK



SATURN
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Sega's competition against the PlayStation and N64. A real 2D powerhouse that, despite an amazing catalogue of games, never really took off.

- BURNING RANGERS
- RADIANT SILVERGUN
- PANZER DRAGOON SAGA

SINCLAIR

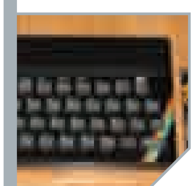


ZX80
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200 ($368) apparently if boxed and mint**
Very early British home computer from Sinclair. Low capability meant limited gaming possibilities. Now extremely hard to get hold of.



ZX81
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) if mint**
Improved home computer from Sinclair, with black and white ASCII graphics. Not as hard to source as a ZX80, but still commands a respectable price.

- 3D MONSTER MAZE
- MAZOGS
- SABOTAGE



ZX SPECTRUM 48K
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



ZX SPECTRUM 128K
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**



ZX SPECTRUM+
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



ZX SPECTRUM +2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



ZX SPECTRUM +3
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
The British classic loved by many. A vast improvement over previous Sinclair computers, the Spectrum was normally compared against the C64 and Amstrad home computers, which in turn caused many playground arguments over who had the better machine.

- HEAD OVER HEELS
- 3D DEATHCHASE
- SKOOL DAZE

SNK



NEO-GEO AES
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
High-powered home system by SNK. Features many high-quality arcade games. Sadly, many titles are now ridiculously expensive to purchase.



NEO-GEO MVS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) multi-slot systems cost more**
High-powered arcade system by SNK, which many people prefer over the home-based AES due to lower pricing of games. (The majority of Neo-Geo titles appeared on both systems, or alternatively can be converted.)

- METAL SLUG 3
- KING OF FIGHTERS 96
- BLAZING STAR

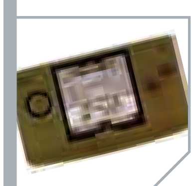


NEO-GEO CD
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184) varies**



NEO-GEO CDZ
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80+ ($147+)**
CD-based Neo-Geo systems, an attempt by SNK to lower the cost of Neo-Geo games. The CDZ is cheaper and has improved loading times. Most CD titles are ports from the AES/MVS.

- VIEWPOINT
- AGGRESSORS OF DARK COMBAT
- SAMURAI SHODOWN RPG



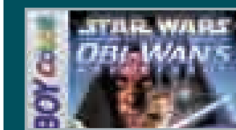
NEO-GEO POCKET (B/W)
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Handheld Neo-Geo systems by SNK that sadly failed to compete with the Game Boy, despite featuring some great games. Still a wonderful little system, though. Be sure to buy the later colour screen model.

- FASELEI!
- CARD FIGHTERS (CAPCOM/SNK)
- MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM (CAP VS SNK)

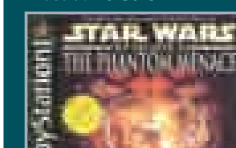
STAR WARS EPISODE I: OBI-WAN'S ADVENTURES
System: **Game Boy Color**
Normally sells for **£15**
Ended at **£7.39**



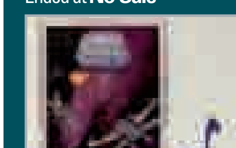
THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK
System: **Commodore 64**
Normally sells for **£2**
Ended at **£5.35**



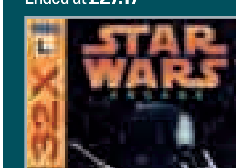
STAR WARS: EPISODE I: THE PHANTOM MENACE
System: **PlayStation**
Normally sells for **£4**
Ended at **No Sale**



STAR WARS: X-WING COLLECTOR'S EDITION
System: **DOS**
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **No Sale**



STAR WARS ARCADE
System: **32X**
Normally sells for **£15**
Ended at **£27.17**



STAR WARS: DEATH STAR BATTLE
System: **Atari 2600**
Normally sells for **£15**
Ended at **£23.31**



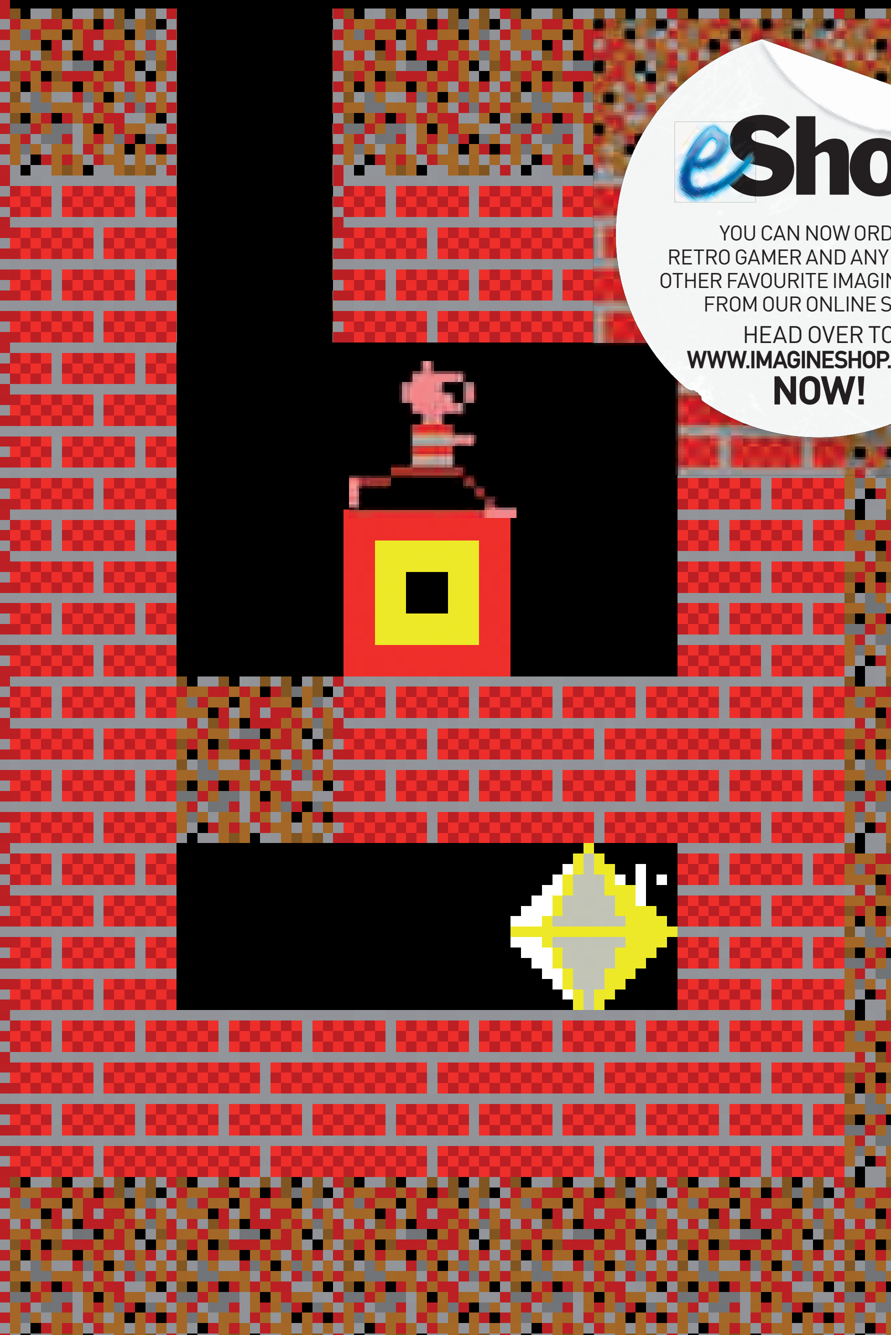
GAMING'S OLDEST ROCKER

retro GAMER

LOAD 53

NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 17 JULY 2008



BOULDER DASH **STUART CAMPBELL** IS BACK WITH ANOTHER EXHAUSTIVE DEFINITIVE GUIDE. IF YOU THOUGHT ONLY A HANDFUL OF GAMES STARRING ROCKFORD EXISTED YOU'RE IN FOR A BIG SURPRISE…

MORE EXCITING FEATURES

» Our *Star Wars* saga finishes with a look back at the many PC titles and edutainment games that have been released over the years

» The creator of *Marble Madness*, Mark Cerny, finds time to take us through his immensely popular isometric arcade hit

» Discover how Japanese developer G-Rev was able to turn its intense shoot-'em-up *Borderdown* into Dreamcast's best blaster

RETRO DIRECTORY

EVERY MONTH, RETRO GAMER WILL BE LISTING ITS FAVOURITE WEBSITES AND INTERVIEWING SOME OF THEIR KEY MEMBERS. THIS ISSUE WE SPEAK TO KEN HOROWITZ, OWNER OF THE EXCELLENT MEGA DRIVE SITE, SEGA-16.COM

THE RETRO GAMER DIRECTORY

ATARI AGE
www.atariage.com
Excellent resource site dedicated to all aspects of Atari gaming.

ATARI ORG
www.atari.org
Another superb Atari site with every machine from the 2600 to arcade classics.

AUSSIE ARCADE
www.aussiearcade.com.au
A fantastic arcade forum that caters for an Australian audience.

CPC ZONE
www.cpczone.net
Excellent site for the Amstrad range of computers with all the latest news and reviews.

C64 GAME ENDINGS
www.c64endings.co.uk/
Great site that has over 260 endings for classic and not so classic Commodore 64 games.

LEMON64
www.lemon64.com
Superb Commodore 64 site filled with insightful reviews and a friendly forum.

LEMON AMIGA
www.lemonamiga.com
This great Amiga website is run by Kim Lemon, owner of the excellent Lemon 64.

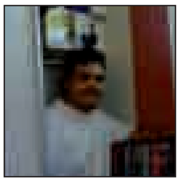
MAC RETRO
www.macretro.tk
Getting emulators up and running on the Mac, this is a brilliant site.

NEO-GEO.COM
www.neo-geo.com
Dedicated to SNK's systems, but with lots of other stuff to enjoy.

SYSTEM16
www.system16.com
Sega focused, but also dedicated to covering as many arcade games as possible.

NTSC-UK
http://ntsc-uk.domino.org/
This site is devoted to imports, but there's a retro section with useful advice on rare imports.

OLD-COMPUTERS.COM
http://old-computers.com
If you thought the Atari 2600 was ancient, you may want to visit this fascinating site.



Retro Gamer: When did you set up Sega-16?
Ken Horowitz: Around January 1994, I was thinking of starting a game website to write reviews and features. I'd written a few reviews for GameFAQs and for the reader review board over at The Next Level, and I figured it was time to head out on my own. I was initially torn over what type of site to do, as I love retro gaming in general. Then I realised that there were no comprehensive Genesis sites. Being that it's my favourite console of all time, the decision was clear.

RG: Why did you decide to dedicate the website to all things Sega?
KH: Well, we currently only cover the Genesis, but I'm open to expanding our coverage later on. I love the Genesis and its amazing library more than any other system. I've always been a Sega fan, but I felt that the Genesis deserved its own shrine. It was Sega's most successful console, but you'd be surprised at how little love it gets compared to other consoles. Moreover, most of the other Genesis-related sites out there have been abandoned, so the timing was perfect for Sega-16. We've been going strong for four years now.

RG: What gives Sega-16 the edge over the other similar websites?
KH: To me, it's our collection of interviews. Other sites review games and write articles, but none feature the amount of interviews we have. Currently we've interviewed over 60 people from the Genesis era and community, including both Sega presidents of the era, and people are overwhelmingly willing to contribute their experiences and knowledge. It's our calling card.

RG: And what has turned out to be the most popular part of the website?
KH: That would definitely be our reviews section, which has aided many readers in finding out about games that they may have missed or forgotten about. And that's why we later created our Review Manifest to try and make them as balanced as possible. It's also why we recently modified them to allow our readers to comment and even score them themselves.

RG: How can our readers contribute?
KH: We're always accepting reviews and articles from Genesis fans. Our Contribute page – you'll find it in the navigation bar – has complete instructions about how to submit a review, as well as any article on one of over 20 series we currently run. Contributors should use our comprehensive Review Manifest, which details our criteria for reviewing games. About a third of our forums are dedicated to site content, and we have an amazing community that's always happy to give pointers or just help out. Those who are interested in becoming staff writers can send in a writing sample for evaluation. I'm an English professor by trade, but don't worry, I won't return your samples back full of red ink.

> "OTHER SITES REVIEW GAMES AND WRITE ARTICLES, BUT NONE FEATURE THE AMOUNT OF INTERVIEWS WE HAVE"

RG: Tricky question, but what is your favourite Sega game of all time and why?
KH: It's *Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse*, which is still a solid game that has held up wonderfully in terms of both presentation and gameplay. It has great level design and is just the right length. My daughter loves to play it, and any game that can transcend a generation of gamers has to be a classic. Sega caught lightning in a bottle with that one.

DEEPER LOOK – WEBSITE OF THE MONTH

Sega-16
www.sega-16.com



There are many terrific Sega-dedicated sites, but few are as comprehensive as Sega-16.com. The passion and dedication poured into this site is apparent, especially when you discover the jam-packed features section, which is bursting with excellent interviews and making ofs. Trip Hawkins, artist Boris Vallejo, and the Bitmap Brothers' Mike Montgomery are a few of the people interviewed.

Add in some excellent reviews of classic games and more recent Sega compilations covering the Mega Drive, 32X and Sega CD and Sega-16.com suddenly becomes an utterly essential resource. Even if you only have a passing interest in Sega's 16-bit machine.

THE RETRO GAMER DIRECTORY

RACKET BOY
http://racketboy.com/
There's a definite Sega slant to Racket Boy, but it's a lot of fun and boasts a bubbly forum.

RADIO SEGA
www.radiosega.net
If you're a fan of Sega music you'll love Radio Sega; there's tons of Sega music to listen to.

RETRO101
www.retro101.co.uk
It's only just sprung up, but Retro101 is proving popular with some informative articles.

RETRO GAMING RADIO
www.monroeworld.com
Superb monthly podcast that looks at the US game market, courtesy of Shane Monroe.

RLLMUK FORUM
www.rllmukforum.com/index.php
All the latest games and a retro section with helpful members.

THE RUBBER BEERMAT
http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/themanor33/TRBv2/
Excellent Spectrum site that champions a lot of rare games.

SHOOT THE CORE
www.shootthecore.moonpod.com
This excellent site loves shmups of all descriptions.

SHMUPS
www.shmups.com
Absolutely amazing website dedicated to the best gaming genre of all time.

VIDEOGAME MUSEUM
www.vgmuseum.com
Screenshots, game endings, cover scans, and reviews.

THE VIRTUAL CONSOLE ARCHIVE
www.vc-reviews.com
Your one-stop shop for everything VC-related.

WORLD OF SPECTRUM
www.worldofspectrum.org
Superb Spectrum site that offers a friendly forum.

If you want to add your website to our expanding directory, please contact Darran at darran.jones@imagine-publishing.co.uk.

END/GAME

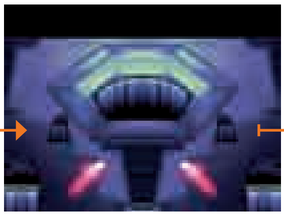


SUPER STAR WARS

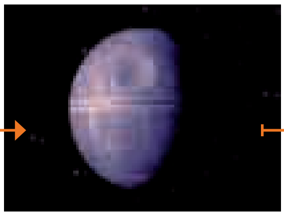
Digitised speech, amazing Mode 7 effects and great gameplay. *Super Star Wars* is quite possibly one of the best 16-bit film licences of all time



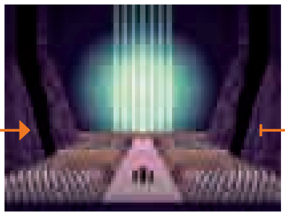
SCREEN 1
After shooting down numerous TIE Fighters, the time comes to finally make that infamous trench run in order to take out the Death Star. Annoyingly, Darth drops by in his snazzy TIE and threatens to blow your X-Wing to kingdom come.



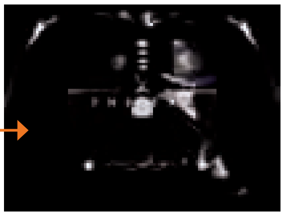
SCREEN 2
The Force is strong in you, and after a tense battle you send the Sith Lord running with his Lightsaber between his legs. As you fire at the exhaust port, the scene shifts to a cut-scene showing your lasers hitting their immobile target.



SCREEN 3
With your volatile load resting in the Death Star's belly, it's time to retreat. You see the doomed space station hanging in space before it explodes in a fashion that Lucas would have tinkered with several years later had he made the game.



SCREEN 4
With the evil empire vanquished, the surviving rebels hold a lavish ceremony to celebrate their victory. Luke, Han and Chewie stroll proudly down the aisle to a waiting Princess Leia. R2-D2 and C-3PO are nowhere to be seen…



SCREEN 5
Hooray, you've reached the end. You're treated to one of those dodgy 16-bit digitised renders that were all the rage back in the day. Peace has been restored to the galaxy, but Darth's bound to strike back sooner or later.